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FATHER ALLAN'S ISLAND

AMY MURRAY

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FATHER ALLAN'S ISLAND

BY

AMY MURRAY

With a Foreword by

PADRAIC COLUM

NEW YORK
HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE
1920

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Now that your day's darg is done, Father Allan, they are many that will be saying it was something over-much, and your wage something under a man's wage. But I shall tell them, that was never your own way of thinking.

Then one and another shall ask, Who is this to be speaking for Father Allan? She came and she went (they shall say) as the sea-ware that comes and goes forth on the tide, and as the sea-gull that lights and is away again. How then should she be knowing?

Well,—but isn't it said on the Edge of the World,

There will come in an hour
What will not come in an age?

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FOREWORD

How, I ask myself as I read the pages of *Father Allan's Island*, how did Miss Murray discover so dramatic a way of writing? What she writes is narrative, but narrative made bare of exposition and with dramatic presentation in its stead. All of us who write about remote places and unfamiliar peoples would like to know how she came to her discovery.

Her phrase, her curious words, her rare gift of appropriate lyrical description, give atmosphere to this dramatic presentation. But the style itself, its inner rhythm, must have come to her as something living. Undoubtedly she found it in the black houses that she writes about. Sitting by the peat fire at the *céilidh*, where "the first tale is from the host and tales from the guests until daylight," she learnt of those cadences and emphasises that give to the folk-tale its dramatic flow. Such an inner rhythm with powerful memories behind it—the flash of the claymore, the gleam of the dirk—is in the vivid and vigorous stories of Neil Munro's *Lost Pibroch*. And such an inner rhythm quickens the grand renderings of Campbell's *Folk Tales of the West*

Highlands—old Campbell of Islay, the father of them all!

As with Campbell, as with Neil Munro, it is Miss Murray's necessity and delight to draw into her narrative words that seem to belong to the rocks and the moorlands—Gaelic words Englished; English words that have been left with the outlanders. A little of the delight of reading *Father Allan's Island* is due to these estrayents—words that are like the red-brown sails that Miss Murray speaks of amongst the steamers in our harbours. Miss Murray has, too, a gift that is very much her own—I have spoken of it already as her appropriate lyrical description—"Out-by, across a water not so wide but that in May time you shall hear the cuckoo from the one shore to the other, a mountain lies sunk to the shoulders. This water is the Kyles, and that yonder Father Allan's Island." What could be more charming and fitting than this description that is on one of the first pages? And what words could be more friendly than the words she has found for the peat fire of the chimneyless black houses?—"The good fire that's down at your feet the better so to warm them. The friendly one that sits not away in the wall with itself, but out where the neighbours can all get round it, and look each other in the face across it, with no such coldness at the back as plagues you in your house with a chimney!"

Comparisons, I imagine, will be made between this

book and Synge's *The Aran Islands*. But they are books that are far apart. Synge's is introspective, analytical—even psycho-analytical—while Miss Murray's has the spirit of clear adventure. In Synge, too, we are aware of a community; for all his solitariness, all his distrust of political methods, there are in his book the marginal notes of a sociologist. In *Father Allan's Island* there is just a man and perhaps a dozen neighbours. It is worth noting that both J. M. Synge and Miss Murray made themselves welcomed by what they brought with them in musical communicativeness—J. M. Synge with his old fiddle, and Miss Murray with her "little harp of twenty-eight strings."

It is the quest of song that gives continuity to this book—the quest of the song that has a spell on it. But it is the friendship that the story celebrates that gives it its human reality. "The Isles are one thing: the Islesman himself is another," Miss Murray writes, and if she had written about the Isles as she might have seen them without Father Allan MacDonald she might have given us another bit of the Celtic Gloom. But Father Allan is there to breast the mist. He moves heroically and he talks humanly. The Island of his labours may be known by names that make it seem as remote as the Islands to which Bran or Brendan voyaged—The Isle of Youth, The True Edge of the Great World—but in Father Allan we have the embodiment of a

people who live not by dreams but by labours, heroism and kindliness. Miss Murray has left us, not merely a portrait of her friend, but the mould and form of the Gaelic gentleman, the true *duine-naisal.*

There are dreams and visions here—sea-maidens and water-horses, wraiths and troubling spirits; there are memories of high romance—"The sweet, high-sounding things that only poets and lovers say in the Great World, are in the mouths of herd-boys on the Edge of it." There is music here and poetry—elemental music, and such poetry as Synge heard on his island—"The rude and beautiful poetry that has in it the oldest passions in the world."

Lately we have been reading a great deal about Islands otherwhere—Islands in tropic seas, where there are fruits and fragrance and flower-girdled girls. Miss Murray brings us to an Island at the other side of all this,—

> Where many's the sowing of storms,
> Where few are the sowings of seeds.

And amongst a people who have it in them to awaken in us all that is heroic and austere. It is this shore, "trod by no tropic feet," that still holds the visions and the music, and the memories of lovers and saints and rovers of an honour-keeping race.—

> Brave hearts, ye never did aspire
> Wholly to things of earth.

PADRAIC COLUM.

FATHER ALLAN'S ISLAND

FATHER ALLAN'S ISLAND

ERISKAY

On the map of Scotland, in the upper left-hand corner of it, you shall see a chain of islands great and small, and Father Allan's Island small amongst them. Not half the length of her own name indeed (which name is ERISKAY [1]), though the map were as big as you could hold in your two hands.

Yet in and about her I would warrant you more ways than you could well be walking in, more sights to be seeing, more songs to be singing, more diversion to be trying than you'd have the time for, once you got her underfoot; though you abode (as I) from a Lady-Day to near St. Michaels. And that's for a good six weeks.

But first you've to get yourself across the Minch, wherein that current that sets northwards and southwards between the Outer Isles and Skye meets with the full swell of the Atlantic. And I'm telling you you're in for some mishandling here, most days,

[1] Er-is-ky.

aboard the *Plover*. "An Admiral in the Royal Navy's succumbed to the rolling of my boat," her skipper tells you with a certain pride. . . . You take her at Oban at six of a Wednesday or a Friday morning, and at four or thereby in the same afternoon I'll warrant you not sorry to be set ashore. That will be at Lochboisdale in Uist,[1] and nowise so near your journey's ending as your map would seem to promise you; though if a boat from Eriskay were here in harbour, a boat with a great red-brown sail, homeward-bound from the herring-fishing and the skipper willing, in other two hours you might make it. But that's an ill way for poor sailors. Take my advice and foot it (unless you've the luck to get a lift) eight miles or so across the *machair*[2] (moorland) to Kilbride.

By "kil" in the name of a place, you'll know that some kind of a chapel (*cill*), or a hermit's cell at least, sometime was thereabout. There's nothing here nowadays but shore-rocks and the sands. Out-by, across a water not so wide but that in May-time you shall hear the cuckoo from the one shore to the other, a mountain lies sunk to the shoulders. This water is the Kyles, and that yonder, Father Allan's Island.

Twice-a-week a boat fetches and carries the post: for the sake of a six-pence, that's your next best way.

[1] Yù-ist.
[2] Màch-er,—*ch* guttural.

But so beset with rocks and reefs and tide-shoals is the passage, so in peril of winds and the mist, that whether you'll wait for an hour or a week there's no telling.

Many a long hour was Father Allan waiting here, when he was priest in Eriskay and Uist too. And one time in the Wolf-Month of Winter, after he had gone to live in Eriskay, no boat could put from harbour good eleven days on end.

When at last one made it, and he waited while the post-bag was looked over, he heard a man say to another:

"*Dh' fhalbh a' chailleach* (the old woman's gone)."

"*Co a' chailleach* (what old woman)?"

"*Cailleach i-fhìn* (the Old Woman Herself)."

"*Co' i-fhìn* (what 'Herself')?"

"*Cailleach a-Stiùradh* (the Old Woman that's Steering)."

"*Och,—dh' fhalbh i mu dheideadh* (has she gone at last)?"

So that's the way it came to Father Allan's Island,—the news of the death of the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland.

Going or coming, from this world to the next, or from this side the Kyles to the other, all's one in Father Allan's Island. *The man waiting long at the ferry gets over at last* serves any man in either case to say.

For what more can he be doing than to wait, whether on the wind's will or on that great Over-Will (nowise less wayward than the other to all seeming) that moves in his own destinies?

With milk, with wine, with oil poured out on the waters his forbears sought to bribe the one.

So now with his tithings and telling of beads would he propitiate the other, and withal abides the outcome meekly.

Which last it were as well for one to do, that's bound for Father Allan's Island.

However, no more than the mouth of a mile to the westward is what might be, by the name of it, a town—Polachàr. An inn and a peat-stack's all there is to it to-day, or ever was, so far as I am hearing. Something up from the strand, yet not so far but that the spindrift may spatter the panes when the wind is off the water; two floors to it, white-harled and snug, with a gravelled door-land before it; a throng place, what time the gentry of Uist and Barra would be crossing this way to and fro and stopping here in-by for what would keep the mist out. Nowadays the *Plover* takes these round by way of Lochboisdale and Castlebay, where indeed you may mingle with much more gentility than here, and spend more money too. For myself, I'd weary there. While here is not only what will keep the mist out well as ever, but all manner of comfort

more solid: a place, Polachàr, where plain people bound for Father Allan's Island may content themselves, and more. For what with Seumas [1] the piper in the townland next, forbye both men-and-women singers handy, you'll not feel time passing: before you'd be knowing, so soon as any sort of a decent day befell, Gilleaspuig would be coming over. With the wind at your back and the tide in your favour, you ought to be making it in half-an-hour.

Father Allan's Island turns her back to the Minch and a cold shoulder to the Sound of Barra, facing west across a sort of inland sea that opens to the Atlantic—this latter to your right as you embark. Your course is laid to cut a corner of this sea, Father Allan's Island lying to your left. Off Barra (some ten miles ahead), in the roadstead where the brig *Doutelle* (that brought Prince Charlie) anchored, fleets have ridden. But into this nearer reach come only such boats as this that now conveys you,—a fishing-boat, its sail dyed reddish-brown. You never see a white sail hereabout. Sails and nets, they dip them all into the one pot; and whether more swarthy, as when they first come out, or more ruddy, as after the sun and the spindrift were dealing with them,—blood-stained, earth-stained, rust-stained as may seem,—these dark sails please you oddly, far or near as you may glimpse

[1] Shày-mus.

them in these misty reaches, set with bare up-standing isles that are the peaks and uplands of a mountain-range half-sunk. The winds inhibit these of woody ground or orcharding: on Eriskay is not the heather nor the bracken nor the bent-grass that would mend a thatch.

Yet because of the wind that blows here mainly, the Southwest wind that brings the mist from off the Banks, the bleak and the grey and the bare take on at short remove a bloom as of the plum or of the blaeberry, in sunshine hinting you more colours than I'd like to name.

And when did landward hills see round themselves the greens, the blues, the violets, that ebb and flow round these whose roots are in the floor of the deep sea? While overhead, all day and every day, is changing of fair and foul.

Now comes the mist, now the rain, and now the sun-glint. And now the narrow cloud, no wider than would wet a croft (as crofts go hereabout) drifts with a rainbow in its skirts from isle to isle.

Come night-time, and the full moon at your back, and against the flying rain-shower you shall see the moon-bow, white as the frost.

Two hills—*Beann Sgrithean*[1] and *Beann Stàc*—and a glen between them; *Rudha Bàn*,[2] the White

[1] Skreen.
[2] Rù-a Ban.

Point that has Father Allan's chapel and his house upon its back; the uplands to the North and the linklands to the West,—that's all there is to Father Allan's Island.

Thrust well out to the water, *Beann Sgrithean's* roots uphold the sand-dunes, the linklands and grass-lands, and most of the "black" houses. You'd swear none could climb him. Yet he'll hardly overlook *Beann Stàc* across the glen, in whose crown is the peat-moss that keeps up half the fires that make the houses black. Any sort of a day—any day but a Sunday—you'll see the women backing empty creels up *Beann Stàc's* side, and full ones down again.

Rudha Bàn stands out well from the shore: on the top of it the chapel and the chapel-house show slightly, for white mortar in their joints and for a wall round. But not so forth-putting the others, the "black" ones down below, whose blackness is within them. Squat, dwarfish, shaggy-thatched, and all one greyness with the hill's roots and the rubble round, the nettles and dockens standing tall on them as on the brae itself. . . . Where are they? you'll wonder, and you standing in with the land. When all on a sudden here's one . . . there's another . . . peeping forth like a face in a puzzle.

Now all the year through, every night, round the fire on the floor in some one or another of these, the folk of each townland assemble for *céilidh*.[1] Time

[1] Kàil-y.

out of mind, so did their forbears before. A *céilidh* for tales, and a wedding or waulking for songs. But weddings and waulkings come never hereabout in summertime, while for a proper *céilidh* you should wait until the corn is cut and in the byre, the peats cast and stacked, the women come home from their herring-gutting in the Shetlands, the long nights of winter setting in. It is then that they full, to the sound of singing,—for *a songless web is unlucky*,—the webs that they weave of the wool of their carding and spinning,—that'll be at a waulking. It is then that you hear *the first tale from the host, and tales from the guest till daylight*,—that'll be at a *céilidh*. But the long summer days are the days for stravaiging; and that by rights should be a-foot.

You might get the loan of a horse, to be sure,—och, yes! and welcome. But it's a brace of peat-creels he'll be used to backing mostly. Carts there are none in Father Allan's Island, nor causeways either. "We had a very good road once, but the hens scratched it up," Father Allan used to tell his visitors. . . . But the path that you see as a scratch across *Beann Sgrithean's* cheek drops down to the glen on the South of him, and climbs the uplands on the North of him, so taking you twice, if you will, to the Minch; while outside the path nothing at all is to hinder a good pair of boots from making their own way anywhere about. But see that you go by

daylight. There's a stretch of the path that has an ill name after dark.

And indeed you were wiser to stay in-doors then altogether, or at least where you at need may get outside high-water mark, or into the midst of the flock.

For here abide not only crofters and fishermen plenty, and over-plenty for their keep, but plenty too of such as neither reap nor fish, *fed on the vain desires of men*, and shy of daylight mostly. At the mouth of the night, between daylight and dark, come abroad ill things to meet, from out the earth, from out the air, from out the water and the Under-World.

By day, the *Ones-that-are-not-remaining* may come and may go as they like: by day, what is to be may show itself to such as have *The Sight*. By day, and they at the flounder-fishing, men are like to see the *Mæighdinn-Mhàra*.[1] "She rose up in the water nigh us," one told Father Allan, "with a small face like a child's, and it a greyish-white colour like a statue. . . . And when we saw *that*, we knew it was time for us to be going."

But the mouth of the night is the choice hour of the *Sluagh*,[2] the Host of the Dead, whose feet never touch on earth as they go drifting on the wind till Day of Burning; of the *Fuadh*,[3] the Spirit of Ter-

[1] Màdj-een Vàr-a.
[2] Slù-og.
[3] Fù-a.

ror, that "frightens folk out of the husk of their hearts"; of the Washer, who sits at the ford with herself in the twilight; of the slim green-coated ones, the Water-horse, and what not. The light that is shadowless, colourless, softer than moonlight, is ever the light of their liking. At the mouth of the night, along the water-courses, by ways that at the hour of dusk and lateness you had best be shunning you are like to meet them; to west of the houses they pass,—what to do, who shall say? their ways being nowise human.

At the mouth of the night, and the pot on th fire for his supper, the *Sluagh* once lifted a man at his own house-end at Iochdar [1] in Uist, and set him down again between the graveyards at Dalibrog, seventeen miles away to eastward, and brought him back in time to see the pot come off.

At the mouth of the night old Fionnaghal [2] in Benbecula saw the Water-horse come up in the reeds at the edge of the *lochan*, and play about amongst them.

It was the time of the Putting-away of the People, she told Father Allan. She had been following on the herd a long way and was weary, and lay down to sleep in the heather. She woke at the mouth of the night, and then she saw him. . . . "His eyes

[1] Ee-och-kar.
[2] Fyoòn-a-gal.

were *taking* (kindling), and his tail going round like the rim of a wheel."

"And what do you think it was?" he asked her.

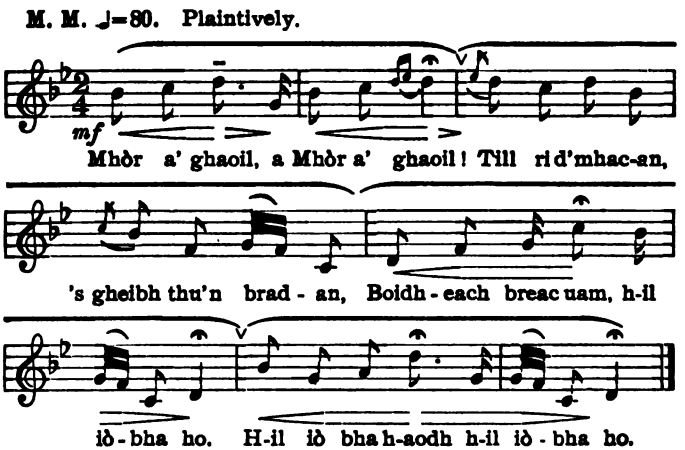
"I think it was Black Donald himself," she made answer; as who should be saying, *The One-we-won't-mention.*

At the mouth of the night, the Water-horse may be a man, and go a-courting till the cock-crow. If any girl go away with him, that is the last of her. Next morning her heart and her liver will be floating on the water. . . .

One time the Water-horse was in love, and took to wife a girl named Morag,[1] the grey-eyed girl was telling me,—she that kept Father Allan's house for him. . . . "He was always trying to get her to go away with him, and at last she went, and she lived with him and had a child. But he was always up and away in the morning before the cock was crowing, and never was back till the mouth of the night, and he never would say where he went or what he was doing, and she was always finding the fine white sand amongst his hair. So she found him out and she left him."

"And *here* he was coming up out of the water every night, and getting the child and singing to him, the way she would be hearing him and coming back:

[1] Mòr-ak.


M. M. ♩=80. Plaintively.
mf
Mhòr a' ghaoil, a Mhòr a' ghaoil! Till rid'mhac-an,
's gheibh thu'n brad - an, Boidh - each breac uam, h-il
iò - bha ho. H-il iò bha h-aodh h-il iò - bha ho.

Gheibhinn dhuit fìon,
Gheibhinn dhuit fìon;
'S gach ni b'àit leat,
Ach nach èirinn leat 's a' mhaduinn,
H-ill-io-bha-hò,
H-ill-io-bhà-haodh,
H-ill-io-bha-hò.

Morag, love,—come back to your wee son! I'll give you a fine speckled salmon, I'll give you wine. Every night I'll be with you, but I'll not be rising with you in the morning.

"I wonder what they *really are*," she mused, and a far-away look in her eyes. "Is it just *creatures?*—or is it—*you* know!"

"Did you ever see one?"

"No,—not I! *But plenty I know that has.*"

At the mouth of the night, on the path to the glen at its steepest, the *Fuadh* met a man in Father Allan's Island, and all but put him down the brae.

And while I am hearing no such tales anent the path to *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn*,[1] yet I am seeing the young men coming there-along from *céilidh* always two-and-two; while The Mischief Himself is in it surely to make yourself late to your dinner, set you out as you will from *Rudha Bàn* soon as ever you get your porridge down.

For at the very first of it you're like to find Gilleaspuig mending nets at his own house-end in the harbour down below. Now, when your Outer Isleman's hands are busy, the songs his forbears made to sweeten labour come into his mouth as at no other time at all. . . .

Very well. . . . Striking eastwards now, you come out on the uplands, whence you view the Kyles endlong; a winding water, and in part a narrow one, to westward mingling with the inland sea. Uist hills overlie them and the inland sea as well: at their far end a mile or so of sand-links keeps the Atlantic out of their roots. Breaking down into cliffs at the end that's before you, here the boisterous Minch assails them, surging in between them and *Beann Sgrithean* to leap and fling in face of them, to foam and to frisk along their flanks, and to trouble the Kyles well-nigh their length. Far out-by in clear weather the Coolins in Skye show small, three-peaked, and harebell-blue.

Now whether any way in all the world has outlook lovelier, I'm not in truth so travelled I may

[1] Boon-a-Vòoleen.

say. But the man I'd see taking his feet out of it in a hurry on a fine day, I'd say he must be carrying fire. And I think one might take the world under his head nor anywhere else find such another one for ups and downs and links and turns. I said as much one day to Father Allan. . . . Well, it was just before the harvesting they made it, he answered, when the short straight way of it would take a man's feet here through oats, and there through barley ripening. So the path had to be as it is.

A coaxer it is and a sly one. Think to make up your time, once past the sightly stretch of it, and still it has tricks would delay you. For here in a house in a hollow is a *cailleach* [1] who can give you waulking-songs no other one at all has nowadays; and in another you shall hear the *Sgeul* [2] *of Michael Scott*,—and that's one that Campbell of Islay himself had never the luck to be hearing. And once let song be raised in a black house, or tale-telling brought to the fore, and you might as well be inside the Fairy Mound itself, for all the care you shall be giving to the time that's slipping past out-by.

Now it was for these I came to Father Allan's Island. Yet if I between a Lady-Day and a St. Michael's took neither the length nor the breadth of her, that was more for Father Allan's own sake than for sake of song or *sgeul*.

[1] Càl-yach—old woman.
[2] Skale—tale.

For not by the fires on the floors of the black houses was it that I sat, most nights whilst I abode in Father Allan's Island, but with Father Allan at his own fire-end, and many a day-long forbye. And when I would sometime be saying, "This will never do!" it was always, "Och,—you'll be coming back some day!" And so I thought myself. . . .

Nine years ago and something more it is by now, and still I am not going; though many's the day I wish I smelt the good peat-reek again in Father Allan's Island, and many's the day I weary for the Southwest wind's rough hands amongst my hair, and for the salt sea-taste of it once more upon my tongue. Nor would I be thinking the way were too long, though I went in the Wolf-Month of Winter itself, so only I found whom I left there at the yonder end of it, nine years ago and something more it is by now.

But never by land nor by sea shall I be finding me a way again to Father Allan.

So here I sit at my own fire-end, in this New World whereunto he never came, calling up how for a season I forgathered with him in his island; what time it was as though he took my hand in his and my foot upon his own, after the old Highland way of one who has *The Sight*, when he would show his vision to another.

And now let me be telling what it was I saw and heard.

TRUE EDGE OF THE GREAT WORLD

In a *sgeul* that's to hear in a black house on the path to *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn*, there's a young man travels North and North and North until he comes to Fior Iomall An Domhain Mhòir [1]—the True Edge of the Great World.

Now that last is a sort of bye-name that the Outer Isles have just amongst themselves. They've more of these than Love himself has in the Gaelic, and that's not a few. And if you were speaking with the people here and there about, I'd warrant you'd find none but had some other handle to the isle he lived in, extra to what's on the map.

How Eriskay came by hers,—*Eilean na-h-Òige*,[2] the Island of Youth,—there's none in Eriskay so clever or so old that he can say. It's easier accounting for that one so frequent in State papers of his Majesty James Sixth,—*Innse-Gaill*,[3] or The Isles of the Strangers. For the tale of those same Strangers, who left the Norse words in the Gaelic and the white heads in the houses, was it not set down

[1] Feèr-ya-mall an Dàwn Vòr.
[2] Ail-yan na Hòy-ga.
[3] Inch-a Gàl.

in the Icelandic sagas, after viking-tide had ebbed Northwest from *Innse-Gaill*, six hundred years ago?

Nor even when that tide stood at the full is it like the name—True Edge of the Great World—was new. Long or ever a long-ship steered west-viking, one Maelduinn, an Irish sailor, had made known how he was sighting, in waters further to the West than *Innse Gaill*, an island "full of human beings . . . resting not from wailing." . . . So early was the Celtic Gloom discovered. . . .

Well!—old as it may be, the name is still a good one. For if *Eilean-na-h-Òige* hints you of a tale forgotten, and *Innse-Gaill* shall call up tales of Harold Fairhair, Magnus Barefoot, and the rest, here's a name to tell you the one tale or the two, as you shall take it.

For here is the place for signs and warnings and fore-runners; the place of places for The Sight; a marchland between the Other-world and this, whereon the Ones-that-are-not-remaining are free as you or I to come and go. And that in their own looks, as they were man or woman still alive; nor in white, but in their own dark woollens, mind you, nor wanting their tongues. It's just, "I saw my brother standing by the fold, and he said . . ." what he had to be saying; or, "I looked up and there was my mother, and she said . . ." what she had to be saying. That's all there ever is to it, on the True Edge of the Great World.

Withal, a place to find one's self so well away as nowhere else, from that World that has to do with the Flesh and *The One-we-won't-mention.*

Some fourteen years ago, come harvest-moon, I was as near to the True Edge of the Great World as one may go dry-shod.

Stravaiging for a fortnight in Argyll and Morven, I had thereafter crossed from Gairloch to Portree in Skye, on a morning of three breakfasts (one at five before the start, one aboard the *Clansman*, just to show myself a sailor, and one more for pure sociability in lodgings at Portree), and now had come to Kilmaluaig [1] in the North. Good walkers make it in one stretch from Portree: so too might I have done, if walking were all I was out for. As it was, I took two post-carts and I forget how many days to it, stopping for some three or four of them halfway at Uig.[2]

When at six of a lovely morning I set out again, the post-master himself was to drive me; and a fine old fellow he was too, with his white beard spread broad on his breast, and a Highland bonnet on his head; who never once stopped the pony for all his jumpings out and in the cart. "Yace," he said, smiling, when at last as he came trotting up-hill after me, I could not forbear to praise his vigour;

[1] Kil-mal-òoag.
[2] Òo-ig.

"Yace,—when I wass a young man we had nothing at all but the oatmeal, and neffer saw white bread from one week to the other. But these young people *now*—there is nothing at them at all but loafs and tea. . . . They are *no good whateffer!*"

His little terrier, enchanted with her outing, fared on ahead so briskly for mile after mile and for hour after hour, that at last I wondered, Wouldn't she be tired?

"Och, no!" he chuckled; "she doesn't *know* she's tired—she's so *pleased!*"

At noon he dropped me to landward of the great peat-moss, in part reclaimed and growing corn, that lies back from the Bay of Kilmaluaig. Here the Minch takes a mighty bite out of the island's black north rim. Black rocks half-circle it, thronged with *duileasg*[1] (which the people boil and eat) and crusted with limpets: at low-tide someone is always pulling the one there or chip-chip-chipping at the other. Off-shore stand the black stacks and skerries for whose sake the boat for Stornoway gives Kilmaluaig Bay the go-by when the wind is in the North. On either hand, black cliffs; the moorland mounts their backs and makes them shaggy at the brows with heather and bog-myrtle.

Between the moorland and the hills, whose tops you'll seldom glimpse for mistiness, the road runs:

[1] Dùl-usk.

along it, or cuddled in neuks of the moor, are the houses and peat-stacks of a crofting townland. You'll be puzzled, till you're nigh them, to say which is which. But amongst them is an inn that rises to a story-and-a-half; and here, in the half-story, was a clean bed, and when I stepped out of it, a deer-skin to my feet; herein and hereabout, moreover, were good company and the best of manners. . . . "I'm *so* sorry!" said a man when I met him at a wedding. "Was that *you* I saw down by the shore to-day? I thought it was Miss ——— (the minister's sister). If I had known it was a *stranger*, I would have asked you to go out in my boat." . . . In the room under mine, the man-of-the house sold whiskey to fishermen and drovers: well up to midnight and most nights I could hear the scraping of their boots on the bare boards down below, but never a rough word out of them, nor even a loud one. Poor fellows! they were fairly whispering to each other, because of the stranger up-by.

Once it was, when I was home again from a strange place, that one who is there now no longer always used to ask me, What did they have to eat? —a thing beneath no one's notice, she would say.

Well, then!—we never failed of milk nor eggs nor porridge, and there were potatoes and rashers of ham, and oat-cake that the *bean-an-tighe*[1] baked. . . . That means, the woman-of-the-house—the

[1] Ben-an-ti-ya.

Flower of Skye, they called her still, who had been lovely as a maiden. "We're not just used to strangers here," explained her husband, when I came asking, Could I have a bed? "But if we will be having a little time we will be catching some trouts, and maybe we can knock over a couple of rabbits up in the croft some night," all of which they did. Tea, water, and milk were my drink at most times. But I mind the morn's morn of a wedding and I not long a-bed (the sun was up before we started home across the moor), and the gentle Flower of Skye coming into my room with a glass in her hand, in which most assuredly was neither milk nor water nor yet tea. But, "It'll do ye *no harm*," she declared.

Twice-a-week I could see from my window (weather permitting) a steamer at the mouth of our bay, thence standing over to the Lews, which (weather permitting) showed in the offing, small and periwinkle-blue; and at last this stirred within me the old westering instinct of my forbears. Could he be putting me out in his boat (weather permitting) the next time the *Claymore* was standing in? I asked one of the men.

"But you'd far better stay with us," said he; "you're acquainted now, and you're well liked, and we will be having some weddings soon."

Now there's nothing at all like a wedding for songs, and it was for songs that I had come. So I stayed out my time there, well content; and not until

some four years after did I get to the True Edge of the Great World.

Meanwhile I came to hear about the Celtic Gloom.

No doubts but I should have had some notion of it long before, if not the thing itself within me, by virtue of the drop of Celtic blood that's there from a far-away forbear of mine. But somehow it happens that whether or no the wiser for that same, it's little the sadder I am. Only for "Fiona MacLeod," it's like I'd never misdoubted what I'd missed, in life and my stravaiging, too: so far, at all events, no Celtic Gloom nor other had I marked in Highlands, in Skye, or in myself. But I might be trying the Isles for it, thought I.

And so, when I set out again, equipped as before with a little of the Gaelic, and with such small skill of the Old Modes in music as would serve me in the catching-up and setting-down of old-time tunes, it was not only, as before, to be picking up here a *rann* (rhymed saying), and there an *òran* (song), and to be pleasing myself anew with observation everywhere amongst the folk whose forbears were of my own forbears' race. I was now on a quest of the Celtic Gloom. . . . And that in all good faith, you'll understand, the notion having taken me most mightily; though I kept that one part of my purpose to myself, and asked no speeding for it.

Speeding I got, though, and that of the best—in

my pocket a letter in the beautiful small hand-o'-write of Henry Jenner, to "The Reverend Father Allan McDonald, Priest of Eriskay."

Mr. Jenner, then Celtic Librarian at the British Museum, while following on Prince Charlie's track throughout the Outer Hebrides one summer, had there fallen in with Father Allan. A king in his own island, no one could do me such service with the singers, Mr. Jenner said, nor was there anyone in all the Isles like him for folk-lore. Some little doubt was of his present welfare, he being a man much broken by his work. But in Edinburgh I got good and late news of him, and the same rede from Alexander Carmichael, who had gathered his *Carmina Gadelica* amongst the Outer Isles themselves. "Tell Father Allan you are my friend," said he.

But when I came off the *Plover* at Lochboisdale, sorely mishandled by the Minch, it was to learn that Father Allan was away on a holiday. So I got a lift to Dalibrog, there to stop with the three nuns at Bute Hospital until he should be coming back.

I had not long to wait. The very next day at low tide, when you may cross from North Uist to Benbecula and thence to South Uist on sea-bottom, Father Allan drove southwards through the fords and came to the chapel-house at Dalibrog. This was on a Saturday: the next morning he was to say Mass there for Father McDougall, who was off on his own holidays, and to go home in the afternoon.

Sister Casimer sent up word that I was with them: he at once returned answer, Would Miss Murray be so very good as to come up to him—he being so very tired?

Bute Hospital and Dalibrog Chapel stand about a mile apart on the *machair* of Uist, which is a twenty miles of bog and sand, pricked and sown with rocks; inset with lochans, salt and fresh, rock-tarns, peat-pools and plashes, long tongues of the sea that lap black mud a mile inland. A draughty place, the *machair*, and at the Hospital a trifle below sea-level. The chapel stands by as much above it: it was up, then, that I went by the *machair*-road that evening, myself not a little weary from stravaiging well-nigh all day long.

When Father Allan opened the door to me, I saw the red of a good peat-fire at his back. He stood up tall against it, straight and lean, with that lift of the head and that glint in the eye that seem to say—before one is saying anything—"Well, here are you, and here am I!" . . . A fair man, and greying a little, clean-shaven of course, weather-beaten, high-cheek-boned, the lower lip the least bit to the fore. For a breath I had the sense that I was taken in from top to toe. . . . Then, "I heard you were on your way!" With this, bowing a little as he took my hand gently into one agreeably smooth and

warm, he brought me in and put me down at one side the fire, himself at the other.

So this was Father Allan. . . .

Plenty light still came in at the window, nine o'clock and after though it was; the soft flattering twilight of summer in high latitudes; whereby, with the peat-glow to help it, his face showed somewhat younger and a trifle fairer than I was to see it later by the light of day. But firelight nor twilight were to thank for a bearing that well-nigh abashed me, so otherwise had I forecast him; as in some human sort, perhaps, the like of what I saw the day before when I came up on deck and heard a man saying, "There's Eriskay!" Our course lay well in-shore; a grey bleak rock stood over us. No sign of a chapel, nor even of a landing-place; two or three huts huddling in the corries at the water's edge. Could *that* be Father Allan's Island? I was wondering then. . . . And now it was, Could *this* be Father Allan?

For here was a man more than mannerly, a man with an air of the Great World itself; barely middle-aged (and I had looked to see him old and broken); flat of back and square of shoulder, quick-moving, light-stepping, his head carried high. . . . The head of a chieftain, the head for a bonnet and feather. . . . Could there be some mistake? What if this were not Father Allan after all? . . . All this (and more) went buzzing through my head, while I was answering his, How were our friends? and, How

was I? and bearing as I could my part in the talk that ran on lightly, never halting, ranging from "Fiona Macleod" and the Celtic Gloom to the house we sat in, and the wall he had himself put round it and the chapel to keep the pigs out. . . . "I couldn't *stand* a pig coming in while I was saying Mass!" . . . This *must* be Father Allan, then, I reassured myself. . . . And I thought as I listened, I'd never heard speech I liked better (English of the best, with a certain richness to the turn of it that was not altogether English), nor words coming faster from the lips of man nor woman; nor seen such a face for looks of young and old together. Such a likable mingling, too, of manly Highland traits; pride, sensitiveness, humour, warm-heartedness and latent sternness; the whole much sweetened by a smile that warmed his keen eyes wonderfully. Light-blue, quick-glancing, the eyes of a man and a masterful one, the least bit puckered at the outer corners as a sailor's are, these gave promise of seeing far across the water as any man's in Eriskay,—as indeed they could. Shaggy brows overhung them, greying like his hair (close-cropped after fisherman-fashion, with a lock left to show below the cap-brim) and these worked about while he spoke or while he listened.

Greyish-fair, well-weathered was his colour altogether. His age had already puzzled better guessers than myself.

Only a few days before at Lochmaddy he had asked a man, "How old am I?"

After a long look and a long thought, the man—who was reckoned a judge of such matters—had ventured, "Anywhere between thirty-five and seventy."

He was in fact just past his six-and-fortieth birthday, and had been for one-and-twenty years a priest on the True Edge of the Great World.

Not much of his folk-lore had he picked up in the first ten of these, he said. . . . "I had no time *then* to go to waulkings!" . . . Then came his breakdown, and thereafter for a while no work at all. Then Eriskay; where, in what he called his leisure, he could busy himself at the setting-down of *sgeulan*, Ossianic lays, *rannan*, words of songs, idioms, old-words, and all such,—ten stout booksful of them altogether. Tunes, for want of skill in music, he could do nothing with, though in his anxiety essaying a sort of Sol Fa of his own. I happened later on a specimen of this, amongst some notes he had given me to look over. But when I asked him, What did his Rs and Ss stand for? he had to confess, He had no longer the least idea.

Meanwhile the young and the able-bodied of the Outer Isles were "taking the world for their pillow," and their songs along with them. The old were passing. The home-keepers, for one reason and another, were coming to be less in love with their old songs, or at least with their old ways of singing

them. Having warmly at heart, then, for some years past, the hope that someone equipped for the noting-down of songs would some day come to him, one night he dreamed a dream.

He thought he was at a wedding, and as he went in, heard someone saying, "Father Dornin has come to take down the songs of Eriskay."

He saw in the room, besides another priest he knew, a stout dark man, speaking in some sort of a brogue that was new to him. Father Allan was curious in such matters, so, after a little talk, he asked the stranger, Was he not a German? "Father Dornin" said shortly, He was *not*, and did not seem pleased.

So presently Father Allan came out. The priest he knew came with him, and said when they were outside, "Och, what a horrible mistake you made! Father Dornin is a Welshman, but he thinks he hasn't a trace of the accent!"

Here I'm running ahead of my own tale, for it was not that night I heard of "Father Dornin." But I think it was in Father Allan's mind that maybe I was come in "Father Dornin's" stead; for while we were talking I felt he was taking my measure, nor did he seem ill-pleased. . . . Or so I was thinking. . . . When all at once he said, "I did not think you would be like *this!*"

Like what, I did not ask, for well I knew what like I was that night, with the weight of weariness

and of low levels on my wits,—dull enough, and more than enough. Yet what does that matter, so long as we make friends? Time enough, thought I. For I could not but mark how more and more his tone grew friendly; his look, at first somewhat aloof (as any priest's will be in face of woman), now dwelling openly on mine; while now and again he spoke of work we were to do together.

The talk taking now a turn towards music, he asked, Was I fond of the pipes?

Now, am I not? I am hearing there are those who hold the pipes are not for in-doors. I like them at my very elbow, and so said; whereupon Father Allan sent out and brought in Seumas, who lives hard-by at the chapel-gate. And grand piping he gave us that night! Reels—marches—gatherings—strathspeys,—the walls were like to burst. Pushing back the chairs, Seumas took the floor's length to his treading and his turning; and all the while Father Allan's foot kept time, while now and again we would hear a loud "*Hooch!*" out of him.

There might have been an hour of this. Then came supper, then more piping, after which I stood up to go back to the nuns. And now for the first time silence fell on both of us.

On the table between us lay some stalks of St. Bride's Flower I had plucked along the roadside as I came. Father Allan took these up, and in a sort of study he began to lay them out, very neatly,

side by side on the cloth. . . . What's in his mind? I wondered, with a little chill as I bethought me how as yet he had not asked me to his island. . . . When he said (nor looking up—still sorting), He was going back the next afternoon.

So I had understood.

The boat would be coming over again on Wednesday for the post, said he at last. Coming now as it were to some term in his thinking (sweeping up the stalks and throwing them one side), he straightened himself as he went on, And would I not be coming back with it, weather permitting, for a few days?

I thought this a good plan, and said so, but wondered to myself, Why was it taking him so long to make?

Then we said "*Oidhche mhath*[1] (Good night)," and Seumas the piper stepped down the road with me; for what with our talking and our supping and our piping, we were come to an hour of dusk and lateness.

[1] I-chya va.

MASS AT DALIBROG

FACING Southwest as you near the shore, you'll do well to shut your eyes and let your two feet take you, such a fetch across the *machair* has the wind that brings the mist, so strong is he to whirl abroad the fine white sands. At the water's edge he'll scoop you up his fistful, to fling it against the priest's windows, good three miles in-shore.

Is luath fear na droch air machair Uistibh—Swift goes the slattern's husband on the plain of Uist, so they say. Truly, a man needs all his buttons there. Mid-August though it is, and we well mended, Sister Casimer and I, we're not minded to loiter on this road that I came down the night before. Now flapping aloft like a banner, now streaming out behind her goes the nun's black veil: well-happed in her black cloak, by times her comfortable stoutness seems to swell out strangely. By times, too, comes a dash of cold rain-drops in our faces; and my hat and my head too want sorting sorely when we come in at the chapel-door at last.

No fears but they're aware of that, these five or six hundred here already; for all that the women, well rolled in their shawls, sit with their bare heads

so demurely bowed; for all that the men eye so devoutly the caps they hold in their two hands. All the benches are filled, saving space for us two at the front; when we come out again, we are to find late-comers kneeling on the flag-stones in the porch.

We are late ourselves, it seems. Directly we have knelt, a round-faced little fellow with a taper held tight in his two hands comes out to light the altar.

Slowly, genuflecting with reverent awkwardness, his coarse boots clattering on the bare boards, he kindles one by one the little orange-yellow flames that fling and flicker in the salt breeze from the open window, whereon floats in a drift of peat-reek from a black house near.

Within, the air is heavy with that same peat-savour, clinging in the woollen shawls and jerseys. Scraping the boards as they shift uneasily in their cramped sittings and kneelings, they breathe hard, sigh loudly, the poor crofter-fisher-folk; while from here and there I hear the cough that comes of the long chilly nights in the boats, the long wet days at the herding.

Now there's no one on earth less in love with such-like sounds than I, nor more put about in his thinking by any sort of sounds at all,—the more's the pity. So sharp as my ears are too. I wouldn't say that the man who *could hear the grass grow, and the wool on the sheep's backs* mightn't have been forbear of mine. Howbeit, there's a quiet of the

mind that may befall even such as I (though never so little pious), when the God-fearing poor at their prayers shall be about him. It may be so that he shall kneel amongst them in a peace no more to be invaded than is the silence of the woodland to be broken by the rustling of a leaf.

A fortnight past, at this same hour, and I was in London at the Catholic Cathedral.

Not to be setting up for a great church-goer, nor yet for a Catholic (being neither the one nor the other), let me own this was mainly for the sake of hearing Palestrina and Josquin des Près and Orlando di Lassu and the plain-song; that latter so well rendered here as maybe nowhere else in Christendom. Going often then to Mass, both High and Low, throughout July, I had happened in the meantime to hear the *Pelleas* of Sarah Bernhardt at the play-house, as also some "Speaking to the Psaltery," by Florence Farr in her own rooms; and in the artful modulations of these master-chanters had divined, as in the plain-song, a music not yet come into its full estate; speech as it were first uplifted to the treading of a measure. And whether by one or by many—choristers or women—so well done as nowise to be bettered, I had thought.

I had yet to travel North and North and North.

And now the little server, having set the last flame leaping, crooks himself in the last of his reverences

and tramps loudly out. Then in by another door comes Father Allan; a stately man and an upstanding in his chasuble of faded red; an older man by morning light, and greyer, his look aloof and stern. Now with a lad at either side of him he kneels at the first step of the altar, and uplifts the Prayer before the Mass:

> *"O Iosa! a' Mhic an Dè na Beò . . ."* [1]
> (O Jesus! Son of the God of Life . . .)"

in a voice that his speech of last night hardly hinted —a voice that has surely not its like in London. And what sort of a plain-song is this? Here is neither the way of Rome nor of Jerusalem. . . .

When later in his island Father Allan asks me, What is it like, this "Speaking to the Psaltery" that Yeats is writing of? I answer him, Very like his own chanting of the Prayers before the Mass. But I like his the better. . . .

"Why,—I didn't know I was doing it *that* way!" he exclaims, astonished. "I thought I was just *saying* it!"

Wednesday comes, weather permits, and Seumas the piper conveys me in his two-wheeled cart to Polachàr, where Gilleaspuig is in waiting with his boat. Two more are for the ferry; an old weather-beaten man who sits bowed on his staff; who has

[1] O Yù-sa! a Vic an Jay na Bày-aw.

no English, but says now and then a harsh guttural word to a young woman, hooded in her shawl, who smiles as she tells me she has a toothache. We embark, a strapping lad at each great oar, pulling hard with both his hands until the sail shall fill; a thwart for our seat, our feet on the rock-ballast in the bottom. Half-an-hour, and Gilleaspuig is handing me over the shore-rocks of Father Allan's Island.

No sign of Father Allan. But by the time I get up to the *Baile*,[1] the townland on the links above the strand, I see him coming down the side of *Rudha Bàn;* a big man in a kilt beside him; a big lad, kilted too, and a big lass following after; and soon he has me by the hand and is telling me how he has just had his breakfast after saying Mass,—it being a Lady-Day; and that these are his friends from Lochmaddy, who were stopping over Sunday and are now going on to Barra with Gilleaspuig. . . . Thinks I, so *that's* what was on his mind.

So indeed he tells me later. He was fearing I might take offence at being put off until Wednesday. But there were himself and his friend, and his friend's son and daughter, and me. . . . And he'd only two beds. So,—and what could he *say?*

[1] Bàl-ya.

STRAVAIGING

M. M. ♩=50. Crooning.
p
(1)
O a - i a o a o i O
a i a o a o i, O a i a o
a o i. Cùir iad mi - se ghlinn fal -aich, Far an
2. Far au li-on-mhòr cùr gaill-inn, Far an
1st.
2nd.
aith-nich i - ad mi. O- ain-neamh cùr sìl.

"In this far glen they've set me,
Where nobody knows me;
Where many the sowings of storms,
Where few the sowings of seed."

—*Old Hebridean Lullaby.*

[1] Phrase here on the repeat.

I

THREE days after, and we on our way towards the glen, Father Allan called out to a man delving his potato-patch, "What weather will we have? . . . We call him 'the prophet,' " he added in my ear.

"Seven days of sunshine," gave back "the prophet" promptly, whereat we laughed. Seven days of sunshine nevertheless we had.

We behove to make the most of them. So one day saw us on the one way of the path, the next day on the other, another day taking our own way; and Father Allan always talking, talking—always seeing folk and faces in the clouds. . . . There was never a tint in the sea nor the sky but he was marking it and naming it; and many the *rann* and the bit of old song that he'd have in his mouth. Half as to himself and half to me, one day of these I heard him murmuring:

> "Where many the sowings of storms;
> Where few the sowings of seed."

We were just then come up through one of the deep furrows in the face of *Rudha Bàn*. If it was the tide that in his by-gone raging delved them, Time has tamed him surely. Nowadays he creeps in as it were but to bring in the sea-ware for the lazy-beds, with always more of the small shells it delights him to be fumbling, to be grinding down into these del-

icate sands that slip softer than meal through your fingers. Take up your handful, and you'll pick out lemon-yellow, orange-yellow, yellow-pink, dull olive, faded rose, amongst the white scraps and the grey. The corries are floored with them, the shore is so edged from *Rudha Bàn* to *Coilleag a' Phrionnsa*,[1] the Prince's Bay where Charlie landed. And here is the choice promenade of the sand-plover. No sooner will the tide be on the turn than he'll be mincing in and out the wash of it; snapping up what he likes of its leavings, printing the wet sands endlong with his little leaf-shaped claws. . . .

As the plover the wave, so have we followed on the plover, gleaning in his wake. Our pockets bulging and our handkerchiefs tied up full of shells, we have come up the fore-front, and now stand looking in upon the land.

And what is to see but thin barley, thin oats, thin potatoes in patches, starveling grass and *seamraig*,[2] the soil in thin tatters, the bones of the rock sticking through? Here and there, to be sure, the small face of a lonesome pimpernel or violet looks up, or the tormentil's little flat rosette sits singly; here and there stands a stalk of wild thyme or hawk-bit or moon-wort; of St. Bride's Flower, Our Lady's Bed-Straw, or the Arm-pit Plant (St. John's Wort—magical everywhere, and here endowed with special

[1] Còl-yak a Fryòons-a.
[2] Shàm-rak.

powers by *Columcille*[1] himself); a harebell, or a heart's-ease, or a gowan. On the braeside in the glen, well out of sheep-reach, are a few stout sprays of honeysuckle, heather, and the gall, while Prince Charlie's Flowers flourish out of reason, nigh to where he came ashore.

But, saving these last, nothing thrives here but nettles and dockens. The nettle makes a fine show of its sombre green on thatches and at house-ends; the docken grows tall and woody as would do to drive a cow with,—if that were not *forbidden*.[2] But these are good for neither food nor fodder nor for firing.

So that when I hear Father Allan saying as above, I ask, Is that Eriskay?

"Well,—it might be," he answers. "It's in a lullaby I took down here ten years ago."

"Is there a tune to it?"

"Och, yes!" . . . To say *Och* as a Highlander does, put you a guttural to your soft high-pitched *O*, and toss your head the least bit with it. . . . "Och, yes! The wife of Ruaraidh has it."

[1] Còl-um-kil-ya—St. Columba, Abbot of Iona (568-97), first missionary to the Isles. "After thirteen hundred years you find his name everywhere," said Father Allan. "If the people were wanting a boy, and one happens along without being sent for, they say, 'Columcille has sent me a boy.' "

[2] "*Tha e anns a'chròisde*—it is crossed (banned)," and "*Cha n'eil e òrduichte*—it is not ordered," are still said of many things, though the people cannot tell why. But the docken has an ill name anyhow. It is *the stick the Devil took to beat his mother with,* and if a mother should lift it against her child, he would *run the seven worlds.*

For your Highlander more than merely *knows* his song and his *sgeul* and his Gaelic. He HAS them.

II

Our first long walk was on a godly errand. Four times in the year Father Allan carried the Sacrament to the infirm and aged, and I had come just before his mid-summer rounds. Two mornings would make them. We behove to take our porridge early, for sake of the old people who would be fasting till he came.

To-day we were bound for *Ros-an-Fhìos*,[1] at the far side of the island; past the path's end—or so had we supposed when we set forth. But beyond *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn* we found the line staked out eastward, with men and boys at work along it. "And *that's* a good thing!" said Father Allan, quite delighted.

One winter's night, he said as we stepped on, word came from *Ros-an-Fhìos* that a man was dying there. So at once he set back with the messenger, each lighting himself with the "torch of the Hebrides,"—two burning peats stuck faces together on a stick; a torch that is namely for keeping alight in a wind that would snuff any lantern.

But now, what with the pelting of the rain, and the gusts that come more and more furiously the more they near the Minch, at last they are stumbling

[1] Ros-Nish.

about in pitch darkness, at a dead loss where to find the house.

"Here it is, I think," calls out the man from a little distance. "Here it is,—but I can't find the door!"

Feeling his way, Father Allan comes up with him, and fingers the walls for himself. "You might look to the end of the world for a door in it," he says at length; "it's just nothing at all but a peat-stack."

Striking out thence to another airt, they next have the good luck to stop themselves, just in time, on the edge of a boulder some thirty feet high; one of those overhanging the hollow wherein lie the half-dozen black houses of *Ros-an-Fhìos*.

And how could a man with his five wits about him mistake his neighbour's peat-stack for his house?

Any man might almost do the like in daylight. These houses are here since the Putting-away of the People.

How Clanranald (the chief) danced at Almack's with Lady Jersey, and behove to sell his lands to pay the piper; how a stranger turned them into sheep-walks; and after what manner the people were put off them, you may read in some part in the Blue Books; or again may happen on the tale, as I did, in course of a stravaiging.

I mind one day in Uist a woman of my own age or thereby, stepping up behind me on the *machair-*

road bare-footed; who made as if to pass, but gave me half-a-smile as she came by. So I told her, "*Là math*[1] (Fine day)!" and she told me back, "*La math gu dearraibh*[2] (Fine day indeed)!" and then, as we fell into step, "It iss a ferry fine weather."

It was raining a bit, I remember. So, each having honoured the other's native tongue, we fared along together, talking in the English, to where a path led aside to her black house. Here we stood for a space, and presently she asked, When wass I going back to America?

Maybe sooner and maybe later, I replied—and not for dourness, but for being one who likes not to be seeing far ahead.

She looked away across the *machair* for a space, but not as one who saw it. Then,—very gently, as Islefolk speak mostly,—she said:

"My uncle went to America. He wass *tied*."

"Why don't you ask more questions?" the one who is here no longer use to say to me. Well, maybe for the reason that I'm not so fond myself of answering. Maybe, again, for want of quickness at the up-take: I can always think up plenty of questions, once the time is by for putting them. Howbeit,—whether that poor crofter, tied up like a sheep for the market and shipped aboard a vessel where the plague had been, ever footed land again; or whether,

[1] La mà—the *a* short.
[2] La mà ku jèrr-oo.

having lived to reach the Hudson Bay Country in the winter, he took root or perished there of his untimely planting,—that I cannot say. Nor whether so, his fortunes had been harder than were theirs who stayed behind, huddled onto the bog like the sheep in a fank.

In Eriskay then were "one Cameron, one Ferguson, and one Macdonald, with their families, and maybe a few shepherds and herds." [1] In upon them, on waste land of the poorest, certain of the Uist crofters dispossessed were let to settle, until what time better land and more of it should be given them. . . . Or so, at least, they hoped, and thought turf walls would do them meanwhile. In that same hope, those same walls have been patched, these fifty years and more, with sods and stones.

It was to one of these, wherein a son or grandson of a one-time Uist crofter was in act to die, that Father Allan groped his way that night through wind and winter-storm.

To-day is of another sort. To-day, "He who was for killing his mother would be for putting life into her again," as the Eriskay old-word has it. By leave of the wind, then, as in honour of his errand, Father Allan looks more the priest than in his ordinary. "Eriskay is no place for hats," he had warned me at Dalibrog, and that the sun and spindrift find a way to fade the fastest of

[1] Report of the Crofter Commission—1886.

blacks. Most days, then, he goes about like the fishermen in dark-blue serge, with a deer-stalker cap and a belted jacket, his trousers tucked into the tops of stout boots, and only the cut of his collar to show him in orders. But to-day a black coat covers him and a black hat too, which latter he takes care to pull well down as we set out; since, for all the sun's shining, the wind seems nowise minded we should be forgetting him. And indeed, where the path climbs a boulder to spare a barley-patch, he fetches me such a buffet as makes me glad to catch at Father Allan's hand—always ready, as though he were used to the squiring of women.

The wind may cuff us now and then, I say, yet less as it were for ill-will than for wantonness. Through the haze, Uist hills show wine-stained, over-laid with colours fair as New Jerusalem's. In the sand-shoals to Westward, the clear beryl-green is blotched with violet where the beds of weed and tangle under-lie. And had I ever seen the like of *that?* asks Father Allan, pointing to the Kyles, where along the shallows blues and greens are streaked with violet and rose. Young and old are out of doors; men and boys at the path-making, backing bags of earth (for your Islesman who makes nothing of a boll of meal on a steep brae will never wheel a barrow if he can help himself), men delving, and men at their house-ends mending nets; women spreading out the sea-grass on the rocks, to dry in

the sun for their bedding, or washing sarks and socks in wee tubs of salt water; old women looking out at their doorways, to say nothing of the women and children that are always at the herding, wet or dry.

Yes, it's all very well to be looking out of window at the rain-flaw passing over, at such a slant that it's no trouble keeping dry behind a dyke, or even a little down the lee-side of the rock. But how about that young lass with a switch sticking out from under her shawl, huddled on a boulder in the sweep of it? For the one who drops her tether is like to find what's at the other end of it in a potato-patch when she gets back.

Well,—no fears of a wetting this one day. *"Là math!" "Là math gu dearraibh!"* sound from every side, with give-and-take to follow of the liveliest,—and the priest getting the better of it most times, to judge by the roars that come after us. . . . "And there's more *Celtic Gloom* for you!" says he.

Take only so much of the Gaelic with you as shall serve to pass the time of day, and I'll warrant you'll not lack for greeting by the way in *Innse-Gaill*. Belike some *cailleach*, taking you for "English," shall scowl on you out of her smoky doorway. But give her *"Là math!"* and you'll get back *"Là math gu dearraibh!"* and what-not more, her wrinkles wreathed into a perfect pattern of good-will. Nor is it otherwise within the house, however little meal be in the pot. A pretty thing to read about, the

Celtic Gloom, yet one well wanted in the lives of Islesmen surely. And I much mistrust those latter-day Maelduinns who think to find it there—unless amongst Free Kirkers.

I remember Father Allan telling me how he was calling out one wet day on the *machair*-road in Uist to an elder in the Kirk,

"It's a nasty day this!"

"It's as the Lord sends," said the other sourly.

"Well,—it's not His best, then!" laughed back Father Allan.

Here in Eriskay are none but his own people. Cheerily, then, and if at no great pace, yet with little delay,—Father Allan being not the man to linger for song nor *sgeul* nor sight whilst his old people wait on him fasting,—we come through the townlands up and down; past the Hollow of the Noises, where no houses are, but where you'll be hearing the sounds of the life that's to be there, and at last reach *Ros-an-Fhìos* in its own hollow.

We are stooping to enter the first doorway when a sound of chanting halts us.

Where we are, then, we stand, and Father Allan bares his head, while I look past his shoulder into a dark chamber of some depth, its floor freshly strewn with white sand. A little to left of the middle, two or three peats send up a slender stream of reek. Coiling and thinning as it rises, it drifts and hangs among the sooty rafters overhead, settles

down in the corners thick and brown. Daylight from a little window to the North strikes out a band of cloudy blue across it, just above the head of a young dark-haired woman who kneels facing us, her baby in her arms. Two little girls cling one at either side; and where these were getting eyes blue as the Coolins in clear weather, and fringed like the peat-pools in Uist, it's easy seeing.

Since early morning they were on the watch, that the priest might find them kneeling thus and chanting, "I am not worthy, O Lord! that Thou shouldst enter here."

Father Allan goes ben, where a *cailleach* lies bed-fast; the young woman follows with the children at her heels, their faces buried in her skirts for bash-fulness; and I, well content, seat myself by the fire on the floor, where two little sleepy cats sit nodding, and a pot hangs bubbling from the roof.

And in the quiet and the peace of the poor hab-itation, it comes over me that something very like to this meant shelter, warming, and nearness of heart's-dearest to my own forbears in the Highlands long ago.

And that whoso should be getting for himself the like in these days, whether in hall or black house, might be calling himself a lucky one.

III

The outer wall of a black house is piled up as rough as a dry-dyke, with neither hewing to the stones nor mortar to the cracks of it, some three or four feet high. Three feet within it is another wall, and a filling of sand or turves between. The roof has a frame of driftwood cabars, sloping steeply to the ridge-pole; these are overlaid with turves, and these again with heather and bracken and bent-grass, which an Eriskay crofter must pull (without leave) on other islands than his own.

A roof, that to wear a man well, so he mend it in autumn ("It's as old as myself," you'll hear a man of thirty say); bound down as it is against the rugging and riving of the winds with a net of heather-ropes, and each rope-end weighted with a stone.

It is not right to put a window to the West, for on that side the *Sluagh* pass by night, and might throw darts within. The floor is of clay, laid by a dance on the first night the house is lived in, and this is strewn with sand, which a careful *bean-an-tighe* will sweep out now and then. A quiet house it keeps. The first time ever she heard boots on bare boards was at the school, a Benbecula woman told me. . . . "And I thought it was just *horrible!*" . . . Nor ever until then, the slamming of a door, —her father's standing back most times against the wall. And thereout must no water be thrown after

nightfall, because of the dead who come to warm themselves there in the smoke.

Night and day, then, the hens have the liberties of the black house. I mind one pecking at my shoes as I knelt on the floor amidst the family, one day that I made Father Allan's rounds with him. He kept an eye on them, he said, ever since one hopped up behind his back onto a table he had spread for the Sacrament. When he turned round, the hen was sipping at the Holy Water. Again, as he knelt to say prayers by the side of a man dying, a hen perched on the bed's head started in to crow. "I waited, and when the bird was still, I started in again,—but only to inspire it to a fresh effort. When all was quiet at last, I began once more . . . and down came a big blob of soot on my favourite breviary!"

This last was the work of the peat-fire, that burns the year round on the floor of the black house. At bed-time the *bean-an-tighe* smoors it, with one of those incantations that, up to some thirty years past, used to hallow each doing, however homely, of the Hebridean's day. So, in the ashes, it outlasts the night, year out and in. Its reek, hanging long in the cabars before it takes leave by the smoke-hole, covers them and the chain that swings the pot (which the children are not allowed to touch, it having to do with *The One-we-won't-mention*) with a black crust that glistens in the firelight and looks

wet, and drops in a big blob now and then—this last only in September. The year round it keeps the women busy scrubbing at whatever deals go to the making and the plenishing of a black house: the partition between the two rooms of it, and the settle against the partition; the driftwood planks raised on rocks along the wall for other and less honourable seating; some three-legged stools—maybe a kitchen chair or two; a chest or two, and maybe a few shelves, tricked out with cut paper, for the cups and plates; a table, or maybe none, and in the inner room the bunks spread with dried sea-grass under home-spun blankets. Short of smoking these and the faces of the women, the good peat-reek does no harm at all,—how should it, to those who were drawing it in with their very first breath?

The blackness of the house, then, is within, unless about the smoke-hole in the thatch. Without, the walls and thatch alike are grey, the russet patch the roof gets before the gales set in soon weathering like the rest.

Mind your head at the lintel! But once you're within, you'll be thinking you never were snugger:

Come winter, come summer, the very first thing that you'll see is the fire on the floor:

The good fire that's down at your feet, the better so to warm them:

The friendly one, that sits not away in the wall with itself, but out where the neighbours can all get

round it, and look each other in the face across it, with no such coldness at the back as plagues you in your house with a chimney.

Into such a house, without a care for how he may be dripping, a man may be coming straight up from the boats.

What is like to it for sociability—the camp-fire in the woods?

Well,—I'll allow that makes more of a blaze. But there you've the wind at your back. . . .

Not so in the black house. So thick a shell it has, and such a good grip of the ground, that whatever the night be out-by, indoors comes little rumour of it.

The wildest of rompings overhead, the roughest of snatchings at the thatch send never a shake nor a shout through the black house.

IV

In the like, in this very same isle, Royal Charlie spent his first night in the kingdom of his fathers; sat all night long by the fire on the floor, that one of his small company, who was ailing, might take such comfort as he could a-bed. And many another night or ever he was out of that same kingdom, I make no doubt he had been glad of such a like roof to his head, a like fire to his feet.

Now this is news to Scotsmen,—or was, ten years ago. "Are you sure you don't mean *Arisaig?*" one asked me then. I bade him go read his "Tales of a

Grandfather,"—not that Sir Walter has so much to say about it either. No song celebrates it, so far as I know songs, nor any print. Wherever you look, you'll see the Prince "Raising the Royal Standard at Glenfinnan," or "Entering Edinburgh," or, "Bidding Farewell to Flora Macdonald." But, "Landing on Eriskay?" Never.

Yet that was occasion to furnish forth stuff for songs and pictures too, and the scene as pretty as you like. An eagle, as it happened, hanging then aloft above a place of loveliness—to those that like the wild and lonesome; a beach of white sand under shore-cliffs; the sea, set with misty mountain-isles, before; a row-boat stayed down by the rocks, and the Prince, young and lithe, leaping shorewards. . . .

But just here he spoiled the picture, and—as Highlanders will have it—his luck too. For it takes an Islander to keep his footing amongst wrack and tangles. So the Prince, for his haste, entered into his kingdom head-foremost.

Take to right from where you come ashore at *Rudha Bàn*, follow round the strand a mile, and there, on a knoll amongst nettles, you shall see some stones of the black house where the Adventurer, half-choked with peat-reek, passed the night; and hard-by (so you come in mid-summer) on another knoll, the small green leaves and pinkish lilac trumpets of Prince Charlie's Flowers.

"That'll be a remembrance of me," they say he

said; and sowed with a light heart his handful of seeds in the sands of this bleak place; nor dreamed their increase would outlast his luck and his good name, and the walls of the black house as well.

V

Folk-song, folk-lore, are shy. Go tramping and seeking, and your quarry shall bide in its hole. Best lean your back against a tree and make as if to take no notice. So you'll see the thing you sought come nigh you.

The gray-eyed girl that kept Father Allan's house for him was always thinking on what next she could be giving me, always searching her brains for somewhat I might "mark down." Yet only for going to the Prince's Bay with her, I had never known—nor Father Allan either—that the children have songs of their own in Eriskay.

It was this way:

We—the girl and I—had threaded the crofts where the women, bent double, were reaping with hooks; had scrambled down to the strand, encumbered with rocks and boulders that are ruddy here, and under water at high tide. This being now just past the turn, we picked our way across them, dripping as they were, and thronged with the bronze wrack, blobbed with yellow at this season; with seagrass, "the long-haired one"; with tawny-edged "ruffles," dark-red *duileasg*, and what-not else that

grows or harbours in such quarters. Tangles, long as coach-whips, lay here too—black lithe stems that are thick as your wrist at the root-end, and taper to the other, where a tassel hangs, of leathery brown leaves.

Picking up one of these, the girl said, "Look *you!* When we were children, my mother used to get this in the spring-time and roast it in the fire. Then we would bite a piece out *here* and throw it in the fire. Then we would rub it in our two hands and say (here she began rubbing her two palms together *deasal* [1]—sunwise. That is to say, to the right, facing South. To do anything the other way is unlucky):

M. M. ♩=92. In a drawling nasal tone—don't try to *sing* it!

Li-ath-ag beag mhìn, 'Thug an-t-ìm a Eir-inn,
Li-ath-ag beag bhàn, 'Thug au càis a Al [a] ba,
Blàs na ghu-ail air chùid a gobh-a,
rit.
Blàs na meal-a air mo chùid fhìn.

[1] Jay-sal.

Little smooth tangle,
Took the butter from *Eirinn;*
Little white tangle,
Took the cheese from *Albainn;*
Taste of coal on the smith's share;
Taste of honey on my own share."

"And then we would get it to eat. But we always had to say the rhymes first."

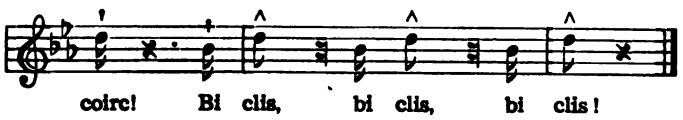
Now, to come on such a thing as this, it was as though I climbed the thatch of my own great-great-great-great-great-grandmother's black house, and looked down through the smoke-hole on her childhood. . . . "You must give me that!" said I.

"You'll get it when Father Allan comes back," said she. At which time she gave me too the

ÒRAN NA SMEÒRAICH
(Song of the Mavis)

Start at about M. M. ♩=152, and vary the time with the content.

f
"Mhic 'ill-e Mhoir-e mhic! Mhic 'ill-e Mhoir-e mhic! Troth'd
dhach'! Troth'd dhach'! Gu d'dhinn-eir, Gu d'dhinn-eir!" "De'n
dinn-eir, de'n dinn-eir?" "Ar-ain cru-aidh cuilc, ar-ain
coirc, Ar-ain cru-aidh cuilc, ar-ain



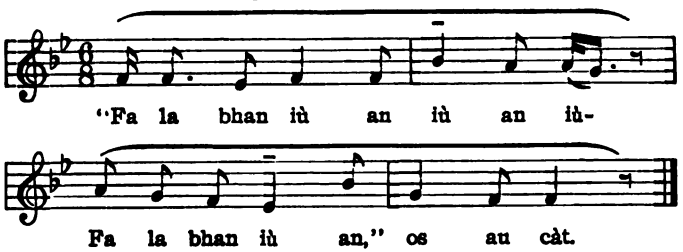
The Mother-mavis: "Son of the Servant of Mary,
Come home, come home,
To dinner, to dinner!"
The Little One: "What dinner, what dinner?"
The Mother-mavis: "Hard reed-bread and oat-bread,
Hard reed-bread and oat-bread,—
Be quick—be quick—be quick!"

As well as the

LUCHAG 'US CÀT

(Mouse and Cat)

In a small and mewing voice.



Thuirt a' luchag 's i's an toll,
"Ach de'n fonn a th'ort, a' chàit?"

"Cairdeas, commun, is gaol!
Faodaidh thusa tighinn a mach!"

"Mairbh thu mo phiuthair an dè,
Fhuair mi-fèin air eiginn as:
'S eolach mi air dubhan chròm
A fàs am bonn do chas, a' chàit!"

Said the mouse, and she in the hole,
"What's the tune with you, O cat?"

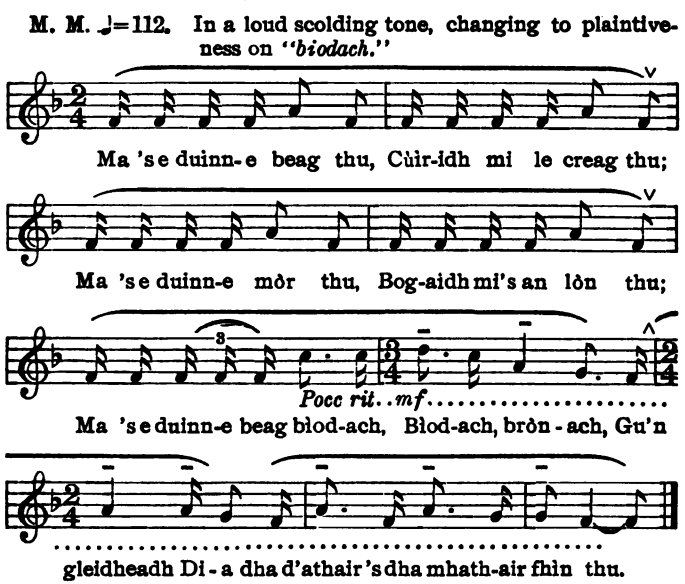
"Friendship, fellowship, and love!
Please to come you out of that!"

"You killed my sister yesterday;
Scarce myself got out of that:
Knowledge have I of the claws
Growing on your soles, O cat!"

With the

ÒRAN NA-H-UISEIG

(Song of the Lark)


M. M. ♩=112. In a loud scolding tone, changing to plaintiveness on "biodach."
Ma 'se duinn-e beag thu, Cùir-idh mi le creag thu;
Ma 'se duinn-e mòr thu, Bog-aidh mi's an lòn thu;
Pocc rit..mf
Ma 'se duinn-e beag bìod-ach, Bìod-ach, bròn-ach, Gu'n
gleidheadh Di-a dha d'athair's dha mhath-air fhìn thu.

The lark is seeing boys coming to harry the nest. She sings:

"If a little man you be,
I'll put you to the crag;
If a big man you be,

I'll dip you in the dub;
If you be a poor wee, wee fellow,
May God keep you for your own father and mother!"

And again:

AN CÙ BÀN

(The White Dog)

M. M. ♩=84. In a small whining voice.

"Air cùl garaidh,"
Os an cù bàn,
"Cagnadh cnamhan,"
Os an cù bàn.

"Were we not often,"
Quoth the white dog,
"At the back of the wall,
A-crunching of bones?
Di-an-do-an,"
Quoth the white dog.

"*Dì*" should be rendered "Tea," which sound cannot be exactly transliterated by the Gaelic.

Occasionally in its place the white dog must give

a growl—" *'Dirrrrrrrrrrrrr—an-do-an,' os an cù bàn!*"

"When should this come in?" I asked.

"Och—just anywhere you please!"

VI

It's a quaint thought, that when the waters of the world were running higher than to-day round *Innse-Gaill*, the sea-beasts were sunning themselves at low-tide on the tops of *Beann Sgrithean* and *Beann Stàc*. Let those who know, be saying how long since that might have been; how long since the tide was done ebbing and flowing between the two, where now the East wind and the West are free to enter.

It's not far they've to go—just the mouth of a mile—from the one end to the other of the glen. Yet you feel yourself far inland there for its straitness, and the twist to it mid-way that shuts off the sight of the sea. Not to waste the good land in the floor of it, the houses are set up along the brae.

In one of these are a *cailleach* and her daughter, kin to the grey-eyed girl. Would I like to be going there with her one day?

Where the path tops the shoulder of *Beann Sgrithean*, it is reported of the Fuadh that he all but got the better of a man. One at grips in the dark with the winds that search the glen in winter-time

needs be no Islesman to mistrust that hands are on him. To-day the wind is off the Minch: as we climb the first stretch, with the sun over-warm on our backs, there is not that abroad that would stir the fringes of the girl's little head-shawl: yet round the turn we meet what whips them in her face and sets our shoulders up. I'm glad of pockets I can thrust my hands into as we hurry down, then up again to where another girl stands in her doorway looking out for us, having set a lad to herd for her the while. The "long girl" Father Allan calls her, and with reason, for one day when she was by him I have seen her all but tall as he. Her face, too, is weather-beaten as his own, for most times she is out with her two cows, and not a peat burns on her floor but she has backed from *Beann Stàc's* top and across the glen. Yet a gentle creature, nowise man-like, the long girl, for all her inches; with the Island girls' friendly grey eyes, neither bold nor bashful.

Islanders who graze two cows are reckoned well-to-do. It would not be for dearth, then, that the *cailleach*, so frail as she is, sits backed to the partition on no more honourable a seating than a three-legged stool. It's worth a winter's walk to see, this poor old ailing woman sitting comfortless by choice, so straight and seemly in her short-gown, drugget petticoat and coarse shoes; so ennobled by what might have broken her, in a countenance already nobly cast. Waxen-white and unsmiling,—and

that last is rare amongst the old folk even in these Isles,—she eyes me gravely, not unkindly, as we enter. Having not a word of the English, she merely makes a little inclination of the head, as she points me to another stool.

What is hotter than fire? The face of an hospitable man, when strangers come, and there is nought to offer him. You shall find this amongst "Fionn's [1] Questions," made up in the Highlands fourteen hundred years ago. And the answer would do the Highlander or Islander to-day. We have sat but a minute or two, and the long girl is going ben to where she keeps her milk-pans; and when she comes out with a glassful for each of us, every white tooth in her head is showing. For though it's few they are, and hard to come by nowadays, the comforts of the black house, the will to be sharing them is good as ever.

As we drink, the girls gossip and giggle (the grey-eyed one's a tease, and is telling of a trick she's played on one of the lads), while the *cailleach*, her gaze fixed on the smouldering peats, seems sunk in a musing neither glad nor sorry. For myself, something drowsy, I'm well pleased to sit as still as she; my mind is drifting with the peat-reek as it wavers up between us, floats slowly towards the open window at my back. When after a little impelled to look up, I find her quietly regarding me. . . .

[1] Fyoon.

Remote, in-seeing, calm, her gaze meets mine unmoved . . . until at last I look away. . . . Then, for the first time, she speaks—a few words in the Gaelic to the girls. They look at me, smiling, and the grey-eyed one with satisfaction.

"What does she say?"

"She says, one would like to see you coming into her house."

The milk now drunk down and the gossip concluded, we stand up to go. And now the *cailleach* rises likewise, takes me by the hand, and looking at me earnestly, says very gravely in the Gaelic something long and rhythmic. . . .

And why didn't I ask her to repeat it?—why didn't I call on the long girl and the other?—both outside the door by now, and once more at their giggling. . . . So well as I knew, too, that in Father Allan's Island, where the taste of honey's on the plainest speech, the old folk are like at a parting to be strangely well inspired. . . .

So that when we were on the path homeward, and saying the one to the other, What a pity Father Allan wasn't with us! it wasn't so much of the glass of milk he missed that I was thinking (though he liked it well and got it seldom). It was rather, *He'd* not have come away without that last word of the *cailleach* in *his* head. A bittie, that, more to his liking than glasses of milk or of wine.

VII

To please Father Allan, as also to further my errand, I had planned to travel to his island as becomes a minstrel, harp and all.

Three hundred years before I had hardly been so bold. Three hundred years before it had but lately been "inactit of commoun consent, that na vagabound baird nor profest pleisant pertending libertie to baird or flattir, be ressavit within the boundis of the said Yllis, be ony of the saidis speciall barronis and gentilmen, or ony utheris inhabitantis thairof, or be intertainet be thame or ony of thame in ony sort: bot, incais ony vagabound bairdis, juglouris, or such lyke be apprehendit be thame or ony of thame, he to be tane and put in suir fe[n]sement and keiping in the stokis, and thairefter to be debarrit furth of the cuntrey with all guidlie expeditioun." [1]

Thanks to which, one might stravaig from Barra Head to Butt of Lewis nowadays in those same "Yllis," nor find any more of the harp than the name of it, still lingering in old-words such as,

"Pìobair an-t-aona phuirt,
'S clàrsair an-t-seana phuirt;
Piper of the one tune,
And harper of the old tune;"

or,

"Deanadh Eoghann clàirseachan,
Na'n cuireadh ceòl annt;

[1] Statutes of Icolmkill, 1610.

Eoghann would be making harps,
Not putting music into them." [1]

But the black nor the colour of it shall you see in *Innse-Gaill* to-day. . . . "Will it make more noise than the pipes?" asked Seumas the piper of me,—somewhat anxiously, I thought.

I reassured him.

Silence, and we jogging in the two-wheeled cart. We were perched on the foot-board, our feet on the shafts; Seumas pulling at his little clay-pipe and plainly thinking hard. . . . Then,

"And will you blow it?"

For all I knew then, the harp was still where I had seen it last—in Edinburgh, nor did I set eyes on it again for other seven days or so. It was this way: however lightly I myself may fare, the harp goes commonly in a box whereat the London cabby shakes his head—measuring as it does 45 x 25 x 17, and weighing, what with other matters I may pack within it, anywhere from 150 to 200 lbs. This being at its heaviest when I set out, I had the unhappy thought to send it by goods-train on to Oban; whereby I not only lost track of it altogether for a fortnight, but handed out first and last, in wires "reply paid," something like a pound. So much for thrift. But at last, when I had been for a week in Eriskay, up came Gilleaspuig one fine morning to say that the box was at Lochboisdale, and that he

[1] *Carmina Gadelica,* notes.

had ordered it sent over. . . . "*That* man has *tonuisg!*" [1] declared Father Allan; as who should say, common-sense (which "Fiona Macleod" says the Gaelic has no single word for). . . . So the very next day a herring-boat brought it through the Kyles and into harbour.

With my heart in my mouth, I saw it lowered into a row-boat, borne ashore over rocks slippery with wrack as those that threw Prince Charlie, and backed up *Rudha Bàn;* all this not unobserved, as may be guessed, by Father Allan's people. What a box! and what, for any's sake, was in it? Something like the pipes, no doubt, but raised to powers unknown. . . . "I thought I would be hearing it up on *Beann Stàc*," one of the men told Father Allan afterwards.

Thereupon, and until what time I have to tell, the people of four townlands set aside all care, so far as might be, the better to listen for the first blast from *Rudha Bàn.*

All unawares, I harped and sang indoors that day and night to Father Allan and the grey-eyed girl. The windows being closed, nobody without was the wiser. Next morning again we were at it, and again no one heard anything at all. Still again in the afternoon. . . . When suddenly from out the rocks on the fore-front of *Rudha Bàn* sounds the very note they wait for—a long-drawn, sonorous blast. . . .

[1] Tòn-ushk.

"*That's* it!" says everyone. "That'll be the tuning of it. She will have been bringing it out and we not seeing. . . ."

So every herd-girl drops her tether: men mending nets down on the shore below (so to be handy-by) come scrambling up. But all again is still. . . .

At length one of them ventures round the rocks. . . . And there stands a big red calf.

VIII

And so, when after many years the *clàrsach*[1] came unto its own, its own received it not. So at least for a time and in a measure. For a time, despite good manners, I could not but feel the people disappointed (after such high hopes) to hear its voice so soft. But before I came away, I heard an old man saying, "A man may hear many things before the tying of the thumbs,[2] and I thank God I have lived to hear the *clàrsach*."

"You'll never be able to keep a string on it here," Father Allan had said despondently before it came. Yet though the iron braces of its box went red with rust; though I played it so often out before the door, to the people standing round, that Father Allan gave the rock I used to sit on the name of *Creag na Chlàrsaich*—the Rock of the Harp; though I had it

[1] Clar-such—the first syllable very long, and the *ch* guttural.

[2] The custom, when the dead are straiked.

in black houses at *céilidh* before a peat-fire of a fervour to melt the pins of it, and out on *Rudha Bàn* to let the wind finger the strings,—for all that, in all that time four strings were all I broke. And how would it be sounding on the rocks down by the water? Father Allan wondered. We tried that out the first fine day.

The sun was already westering, and a great wind blowing out of the North, but we came into still weather as we climbed down the southerly side of the scarp. Under its cover, the inland sea stretched flat and sleek below, flashing full in our faces, so that we might hardly bear to look towards Fuday, where the boats lay off-shore at the flounder-fishing, with their brown sails hanging limp.

No weeds are on the shore-rocks to the South—*because The Flood came that way.* Where we would, then, we seated ourselves; and so soon as the harp sounded over the water, up came the anchors, and out came the oars. Slipping up one-by-one through the dazzle with never a splash, to this side and that they lay-to (not in face of us, for manners' sake) as near as rocks and shoals would give them leave; as their own forbears might have stayed, long time before, in that same reach, to listen to the *Maighdinn-Mhàra.* And for all I knew, she might herself be listening; she alone, amongst the "bairdis" of *Innse-Gaill*, surviving for good reason. For how to put a mermaid in the "stokis"?

Howbeit, we saw nothing of her, and by-and-by addressed ourselves to climb the brae.

But not yet are we done with our music, for the wind is still abroad; and whenever we breast the headland he coaxes the strings so that these begin sighing and singing as we fare to cover of the chapel-wall. And who's here but *Pèigi Mhòr*,[1] up from the *Baile*, doing a bit of her washing in a wee tub and keeping her eye on the cow, while engaged in a gossip with the grey-eyed girl, who has her knitting of grey wool for Father Allan's wear. So again I tune and sing—this time their favourite "Twa Sisters." And wherever a kyloe is grazing, far or near along the slopes or in the hollows, the head of a herd-lad or herd-lass is bobbing up behind a rock; while in every doorway of the *Baile* down below I see a woman standing. Nor am I in doubt of my favour; for when I come to,

"And there they found a drowned womàn,"

I can see for myself that Peigi *Mhòr* is (as the grey-eyed girl says afterwards) "near cryin'."

Well,—I slept in my bed that same night. But suppose it had been in the reign, not of Edward the Seventh, but of His Majesty's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather.

Most likely I had sat it out in the "stokis."

Next day sees the start of what one of the men calls *a ferry consecutive weather*, which keeps us indoors for a while.

[1] Peggy Vore.

RUDHA BÀN

To say it is only the nettles and dockens and Prince Charlie's Flowers that thrive in Father Allan's Island, is to slight the *crotal*,[1] that whitens the stones and scarps of *Rudha Bàn*, and yields a fine dye, yellowish-brown, for the woolens. But you'll never see *crotal*-dyed woolens in the boats, for *what comes from the rocks will go back to the rocks.*

When the nights are at the longest, and the Northern Lights leaping the highest on Uist hills, the *crotal* oozes an ill-looking juice whereby at morning light the rocks are seen as though bloody-wet. *Fuil-nan-t-Sluagh* [2]—the Blood of the Host, the people call it, and thereby they hang this tale:

"When the rebellious angels were being cast out from Heaven, Michael gave word to shut the gates of Heaven and Hell. Those who were in the pit already, stayed there; those who had reached the earth became the fairies, and those who fell among the rocks, the echo. Those who were in the air are there and fighting still."

Look to North in the night-time and you'll see them, and their blood on the stones in the morning.

[1] Crottle.
[2] Foò-il nan Tlò-og.

In shape like a-boat turned turtle, stern to land and prow to sea, *Rudha Bàn* thrusts well to West, flanking the Kyles; a rock of height, whence on every side one may look down. Yet not for that does the spindrift spare the house on top, nor the flying sand fall short of it, nor the Southwest wind forbear to fling a dash of salt into the priest's rain-barrel, to spoil his tea for him; while all day and all night, with the sand in his fist, he grinds at the walls' joints and the window-panes.

No boughs has he to shake in Father Allan's Island, no sedges to sigh amongst; he must make his music other ways. Down at your very feet, then, within a dry weed he'll set up such a skirling, high and thin, as one may hear who listens at the Fairy Mound, on a night when they're footing their reels there in-by. Somewhere up my chimney, moreover, he'd a bass-horn stowed away, and whiles in the night-time would labour to wind it. *Hooch! Hooch!* I would hear in my slumber, and by that token know the mists were on the way.

So it was once when Father Allan had announced at bed-time he was starting early the morn's morn to say Mass at Castlebay. But all that night my chimney puffed and groaned, and when I looked out in the morning, *Rudha Bàn* was shut in from the rest of the world; and at breakfast there was Father Allan. In my folly I ventured, It wouldn't be easy going to Barra?

"It wouldn't be easy *finding* Barra," answered Father Allan a bit drily.

Nor is the wind content to breathe on reed and brass alone. In a corner of my window-pane he had hidden away his wee fiddle, whereon in broad daylight he would scrape me many a fine strathspey. Once again, in the small hours, he mocked me the harp so well that when the grey-eyed one brought me in my morning cup of tea, she asked me, Was I playing?

Down below in the townlands the fires are burning on the floors the year round. But up on *Rudha Bàn*, when the wind was easterly, not a chimney in the house would draw, no matter what chimney-pots Father Allan might be getting over from *The Adjoining Kingdom* (in such wise it pleased him, whose own stock was kin to the Lords of the Isles, to mention the mainland), while to keep any slates at all on the westerly slope of his roof he had to have them set in mortar. Lower down, he had surely been snugger. But, "I like to think they can be seeing *this*," he said one day as he was putting oil into the lamp that burned before the altar in St. Michael's: whenever the boats came darkling through the Kyles, the men were on the look-out for that glimmer in the narrow windows up above. And if it behove a church for men seafaring to be sightly, where was its priest's place but beside it? and what was a trifle of weather more or less to

him, against an outlook North, East, West, and South, across salt water? For even to the East, where *Beann Sgrithean* shuts off the Minch for most part, through the throat of the Kyles he runs leaping and flinging. Sunrise and moon-set too Father Allan might observe from his own bedroom window; but *it is not right* to put a window to the West,—even in a priest's house. So for sight of the long bright weltering way that leads at sundown straight to Labrador, Father Allan must step forth beyond his west-croft wall; thence looking on the inland sea and far out-by, where on the reefs of Uist the Atlantic surges to a slower beat than would be stirring the light heels of the Minch.

So facing, Uist lies to right; in some part within cuckoo-cry across the Kyles, yet never with such looks of nearness as might be, because of the South-west wind and what he brings. Well away in the offing to left rises Barra, behind whose hills in winter-time the sun is bedded. That way come the mists from the Banks. Midway lies the low green isle of Fuday,[1] under sheep now; where the last of the Strangers were put to the sword in the night-time long ago by the M'Neills. Near-by on *Rudha Bàn* itself are cattle grazing, and women and bairns at the herding; and lower to landward, the Other House, the "merchant's," who buys up the fish and keeps The Shop down in the harbour. Below on

[1] Foò-dy.

the linklands, the *Baile*, biggest of the townlands; something like a score of huts that front this way and that way, with neither a kail-yard at the house-end nor a brier-bush at the door. From above they appear as flung down and left there, as a child will leave his blocks when tired with play. But, "You ought to see them when I go in to say the early Mass," Father Allan said; "when the sun is just up, and the thatches all smoking like censers." Four townlands of these were in sight, nor any thatch of them but covered his own people. He never failed of stopping in the chapel doorway to look down on them, he said; having first to make a corner where one day the wind laid hold on me so roughly that, before I could stop myself, I was skipping down the brae. But, "*That's* nothing!" laughed Father Allan. Come winter, and he'd be going *this* way,—leaning half his length before him—wading in the wind. . . . "And if it would stop, down I would go!"

Something being amiss with the draught of the chimney upstairs, in the room where he kept his books, he sat in the dining-room; where I remember we went fireless twice or thrice, not to be smothered in smoke, with the peat-ash flying all about the room. With the wind in any quarter but the East, however, the fire in the grate kept this room cheery; after a spare fashion it was well appointed, and most delicately clean, as indeed was the house all over.

I used to wish, when I saw Father Allan weary, that he had a couch to stretch himself upon, or at least that his one arm-chair, covered in hair-cloth, were not well-nigh as straight in the back as himself. But he thought that in this, with his feet in another, he did well enough.

On the sill of the deep-set double window giving South were some pots of pelargonium and geranium, very thrifty and in bloom, but not in Father Allan's favour, helping as they did the curtains (cotton-lace and festooned crosswise) to shut out the sight of the water and the hills of Barra, and that "othering (*atharraich*)" of the weather that he never wearied watching. On the walls, tinted robin's-egg-blue, hung some views in Spain and photographs of brother priests, and a coloured print or two, agreeably faded, of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart; and while warming his feet he could look up at the likeness of his late beloved "Bishop Angus[1]—just a *darling* bishop!" All these were of his choosing: so were not the curtains, nor the vases on the side-board, of that uneasy sort that topple over if you touch them; thin glass, backed with quicksilver, painted in crude colours, huge, yet light as corks. Nor again were the china poodles facing right and left from either side the black marble clock, which had been his "presentation" when he left Dalibrog. He had hinted once at putting these up-stairs, but, "They're very *hand-*

[1] Á-har-ich—the *a* short.

some, you know!" the grey-eyed one had protested, quite shocked. While as for the curtains, "I held out against her for three years—but I had to give in at last," he confessed.

"A people [the Highlanders] careless of art and apparently incapable of it, their utmost effort hitherto reaching no further than to the variation of bars of colour in square chequers," declares John Ruskin—whose own forbears (*na Rusgainn*) had none the less borne a hand in cutting out the serpent-work on the crosses in *Innis Draonich*[1]—the burial-island in Loch Awe. This he must surely not have known. But while art-work and art-craft of honourable sorts are done to-day by Gaels town-bred, so far as for the country-folk John Ruskin may be right enough. I have seen in no black house what would disprove him. The wild and lonesome loveliness about them quickens the Islanders' fancy not to artful hand-work, but to speech and song.

"Have they any such fear of the sea as we hear of amongst Newfoundland fishermen?" I once asked Father Allan.

"It is only the rocks that they fear."

"It would be hard to find anywhere men better pleased with their lives than these poor fishermen," he read me out one day from a journal he'd begun but not got very far with. "You'll see them out all night in a storm," he went on, "coming up from the

[1] *Ao* like *u* in *curl*. In-ish Drù-nich.

boats in the morning with a song in their mouths. Their poor wives will have been up on the hillside since before daylight looking out for them, and when the men come up singing and joking, they say, '*Here* we are breaking our hearts—and *you're* quite pleased!' . . . I've often watched one of them in a rough sea, baiting lines at the gunwale, both hands engaged, upright without effort and unconcerned, balancing himself with the very bottom of his boat standing up against the back of him. . . . There was a man who had been a deep-sea sailor came here once, and they didn't like to have him around, for he was always falling overboard."

More than once I am hearing it said that the Celt is by nature no sea-farer, and that the present hardiness of Outer Islesmen comes, together with the white heads on some of them, from the Lochlanner (the Norse) blood that's in them,—that's to say, from the vikings. Maybe so. And yet . . . before ever a Lochlanner footed *Innse-Gaill*, the monks from Holy Isle were boating these waters in coracles of bull's-hide stretched on sticks. "To be feared of a thing, and yet to do it, is what makes the prettiest kind of a man," says Alan Breck. And pretty men must they have been, for all their frocks, who risked their share of bones in such a craft amongst the rocks and shoals and winds and mists of *Innse-Gaill*.

Whether from sea-roving priests, then, or sea-

rovers from Lochlann, as it may be, the Islesman to-day has this notion, "The sea is more blessed than the land."

"Where will he be?" asked Father Allan one coarse night at Dalibrog, when sent for from across the Kyles. One man had stayed with the boat at Kilbride, while the other had come to fetch Father Allan. On the way to the landing-place, footing it through wind and rain, Father Allan bethought him how there was no shelter there. "Where will he be waiting?" he asked.

"He won't be on the shore at all, by The Book! It is in the boat itself he will be. The sea is holier to live on than the land." For *The One-we-won't-mention* has no power at all in *Innse-Gaill* outside high-water mark; you're safe there from the *Fuadh* as you were within the flock.

After vespers of a Sunday afternoon in summer, when it chances fair, you'll always see some of the men with their backs to the wall of the west-croft on *Rudha Bàn*, smoking pipes and looking out upon the water. . . . "But you'll never see the women up there." They get enough of that, I daresay, while the boats are out. I wouldn't be calling the tunes of them just merry, the sailor-songs the men sing, yet the words are mostly otherwise; for if there's plenty sadness in the lives of fisher-folk, that is mainly on the spindle-side. To the men, the spice of danger and the pleasures of good company; to

the women, the watching and the waiting. To them, too, the herding from early to black, with as many wettings, most days, as the hours between. Healthy, then, in the main though they are, bearing broods of a dozen with only the knee-wife's tending, and keeping their young looks far beyond the term of women in the town, the face-ache—plague of draughty places—vexes them sorely. At *céilidh*, and the peat-fire like to roast you, you'll always be seeing some woman with her head happed in her shawl.

Good reason why, then, I should say, that lullabies should have that mournful lilt in *Innse-Gaill*, where any night is like to make wives widows and weans fatherless. Good reason again why an Island woman would sooner look upon a curtain than the sea-scape it shuts out. I fancy the grey-eyed one spoke for most of them, that day we visited the *cailleach* and the long girl in the glen.

At the top of the path we turned to view about us. The Kyles in their shallows were mocking the rainbow, the rock-pools shining like the lift; the sea in its deeper reaches was a floor fit for the Saints in Heaven to cast their crowns upon. Seeing which, I said . . . well,—what anyone might be saying; whereat the grey-eyed one smiled indulgently.

"Don't you see it yourself?"

"Yes," she admitted; "I see it *now*."

Live and learn. One summer, two artists, friends

of Father Allan, stopping with him, she had been by way of hearing somewhat of their talk. . . . "And I would be thinking to myself, What do they *see?* what do they *mean* at all?—and weren't they *foolish* to be talking about *colours!*"

A fine creature none the less, the grey-eyed girl; one with qualities to serve her master better than the best of eyes for colour. The daughter of a *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn* woman, holding herself high and her office too, she knitted and span for Father Allan, and had the knack to make delicious even the salt fish and potatoes that were the best and all he got to eat for half the year; while with a younger girl, red-headed (who was always letting fall the fire-irons early in the morning, while redding the room just under mine), she kept the chapel-house a pattern for neatness and cleanness, and her master care-free, so far as she was able.

Thanks to her, he never knew what sort of a home-coming certain of his men-folk made, one night while I was with him,—whisky about it, and too much of it. Some of the girls, coming home from the Shetlands, were aboard; there was screaming, then, down in the harbour, over the wild work the men made of letting down the sail, nor were the men themselves just what you might be calling quiet with it. But by good luck the noise came up not at all to the fire-end where we sat, though plainly enough to be heard in the kitchen.

Knowing this, next day one of the men sought out the girl. "Did you tell Father Allan?" he asked anxiously.

"No," said she, "I didn't. But it wasn't for the sake of *you*. It's just that I don't want Father Allan to be breaking his heart over you." For she knew that if *he* knew, he would have them all up to the altar-rail, come Sunday morning. . . . "It's no use putting your heads down," he would warn them, having named them where they sat. "I can see you very well there." So up they must go, to take a good sorting before the whole church-full, and to sign the pledge before he would be letting them back to their seats. All of which, this good and faithful servant knew, were no kind of doings for a man with a "bad" heart.

"A grand purveyor—when there's anything to purvey," as Father Allan well might call her, she watched the boats as a town house-wife watches the markets. One day I saw her stand looking out of window. . . . Could she be seeing *colours?* . . . Suddenly she cries, "They're goin' to fish for flounders! *Trothad, trothad, a Chaluinn*[1] (hither, hither, Caluinn)!"—this last to a little chap herding near-by, whom she bids go down and intercept the men when they shall come ashore.

"It's the son of my father and mother will do

[1] Trò-at, trò-at, a Chàl-in!

that!" cries Caluinn, delighted to be serving Father Allan.

So that night we have a fried flounder to our supper, while another, split and salted, hangs over a line in the kitchen to dry against another meal.

This was the season of plenty. Besides the flounders, then, sometimes she served us mackerel, sometimes herring, fresh or salt—never, I think, the coarser ling that is the stand-by in the black houses; and once or twice a slender joint, of a savour most delicious, from one of the little thin sheep. Was it her boiling, I wonder, that made so tasty the small waxy potatoes, the turnips, and the kail? These last two grew on a ledge half-way down the easterly flank of *Rudha Bàn*, where the rock had been blasted to a depth sufficient, and a plot walled round. From these she brewed us mighty broths—that sort that Lowlanders always refer to in the plural. . . . "They're very good the day. Will ye no' take a few more?" . . . Milk was too scant for much baking: bread had to come by many stages, and how old I cannot say, from the Clutha Bakery in Glasgow. But I remember most excellent wheaten scones now and then, home-made, and once or twice those potato-scones that are much the same, I suppose, the world over. There was always an egg to our breakfast, besides our porridge and our tea; and before this again, the real comfort of a cup of tea a-bed—"the way ladies have it on the mainland," where the

good creature had once been for a little while in service.

Fortified therewith, I would be waiting by the kitchen fire when Father Allan came in from saying early Mass, a stately figure of a man in his soutane and beretta. Stooping, he would warm his hands (the chapel being even then a place to shiver in) before we went "down,"—that is to say, into the sitting-and-dining-room. Porridge would no more than be dished out, nor tea poured, but he was started on a talk that would outlast the morning. The girl, coming in to lay the cloth for dinner, would find us at it still, to her great satisfaction. "It's *just a good thing* for him to have someone to be talking to," she would say to me afterwards.

Going towards the table, telling me some tale, Father Allan lost no time, but crossing himself at the end of his sentence, would in the same breath begin on his *In nomine Deo*. . . . While I, taken unawares, would sometimes be well launched on a highly secular remark—or maybe laughing loudly at his last words—before I could stop myself. This never put him out. But I remember his pulling himself up aghast more than once in the middle of the meal to ask me, *Did* he say the blessing?

We had always a cup of tea or cocoa, and sometimes a pudding, at the end. These served, the girl would then take up her stand in the doorway to relate, with much dramatic action, how *Pèigi Mhòr*,

a woman somewhat up in years, was chasing a sheep out of her barley-croft that morning, or whatever else happened to be the latest news up from the *Baile*. One day, at the start of the "ferry consecutive weather," she asked me at this time, Had I such a song as *this?* Then, fingering her apron-hem, her eyes fixed on the curtains of her choice, with a far-away look in them, and a little plait between them that was not there commonly, she lifted the tune that was running in her head all morning.

With that, I got out my pencil and paper and started noting down.

"Father Dornin has come at last!" said Father Allan.

"FATHER DORNIN" AT WORK

I

"THE songs and the *sgeulachdan*[1] (tales) were all driven over here from The Adjoining Kingdom," I remember Father Allan saying. "They could get no further, and here they have stayed;" the former in greater store, we found, than he had at the start supposed. We should be doing well, he had thought, to get—say—fifty. But within his own house were forthcoming from the grey-eyed girl some sixty-odd. . . . "I didn't *know* I had so many!" . . . What with these and the songs the wife of Ruaraidh had, with a song or two a-piece from women here and there amongst the townlands; with songs from Gilleaspuig the skipper and the other *gillean*[2] (lads), as well as from the old folk and the children even, there came at last to be set down something over a hundred. A good showing that, thought he, and made great reckoning on seeing them one day in print, as also on the fair copy I was to write out for him meanwhile.

"Send me the songs," were his last words at Pol-

[1] Skàil-ach-kan.
[2] Gil-yan. (G hard.)

achàr, as we shook hands over the side of the two-wheeled cart; cutting short what I was trying to get out with a "Never mind about *that!*—only send me the songs."

Said I to myself, He'll not be waiting long. So a fortnight after, so soon as I was settled down again, I walked into Stirling from St. Ninian's to buy me a blank music-book by way of a beginning. But that very day came word that he was gone.

II

Certain few—as the Child Rimes—Father Allan believed were nowhere else set down. Others already long in print for use by Highland Choirs he wished noted anew; whether for the sake of some uncommon turn the tune might be taking in his island, or of recovering what he called *the folky way of it*,—somehow lost out in course of noting hitherto. None were to claim, as against all others, to be the one *right way of the tune;* but only to set forth faithfully the way of some one singer, in a region where each has his own way—the way of his mother, most like, with a twist of his own to it extra.

Mark him at *céilidh*—how he'll keep to his own way unmoved, and to his own key too, amongst his neighbours at their loudest. Yet how he came by any way at all would puzzle him to tell you. "I'm

sure I never wasted any time learning them," he'll say.

Easy come, easy go. Once let him get out of that way of his, and it's odds if ever he gets back into it again. How this may come about, I had the luck to observe for myself in Father Allan's Island.

III

With no dearth of men-singers, the music at the Mass was mostly made by women. But when I first came, these were still at the fish-curing in the Shetlands, whither they go in May. Meanwhile, some of the young girls, led by the schoolmaster, gave us the *Kyrie* and *Sanctus* from *Webb in F;* a weak sort of a Sunday-school stuff, to be sure, but, sweetened as it was by their fresh trebles and the schoolmaster's soft Irish tenor, we went on well enough with it for some four Sundays.

Then on a Friday night a herring-boat came in (somewhat tumultuously, as I have told); and next morning when I stepped abroad on *Rudha Bàn*, if I looked along the slopes and hollows, brown-faced and strapping girls I had not seen before were herding there; while down among the houses in the *Bàile* I could see great going-in-and-out. On Sunday again, from out the loft where the singers sat, there sounded a strain more robust—and more churchly too—than *Webb in F;* a hymn of several stanzas in

the Gaelic. Said I to myself, Now *that* is something like.

Was it Gregorian? I asked of Father Allan, so soon as we were set down to the tea and porridge we never got until after Mass on Sundays.

His face fell. It was a song the women used to be singing in the houses, he replied; a *Cradle-song of the Blessed Virgin*, that he had taken a fancy to hear sung in the chapel now and then. . . . "But they have spoiled it—do you hear how *plain* it is? But everyone had her own way of the tune, and no two the same,—and how would it do for everyone to be putting in her own twists and turns? So the only way was to leave them *all* out. And now there isn't a woman on the island, so far as I know, who has the old way."

"What a pity!" I had all but said, when our talk of the night before came back to me,—or *his* talk rather; my part, at our *céilidh*, being mainly to listen. The Church in Italy in the Middle Ages, he had said, had made great use of the *Canti Populari*,—that is to say, of matter like that of the *Cradle-song*.

Now, must not these too have been "spoiled"—made "plain"—after a like fashion, before being put to a like purpose? Yet look at them now—the twists and the turns to them. Wasn't there a good chance, then, that some day the *Cradle-song* itself might——

"Sprout out again!" he cried, delighted.

And yet, when he came to think it over later, might the mischief so indeed be quite undone? Give the singers time, and the sprouting-out might be reckoned upon, to be sure. But in the self-same ways? He thought not. *That* song, then, he gave over for lost; in nowise consoled by knowing the Church the richer for another hymn-tune.

IV

And what he, in all good-will and piety, had wrought unwittingly on one, he saw—or thought to see—threatening all and sundry; and that through an endeavour no less well-meant than his—the *Mòd* [1] to wit.

Like his own aim, that of this great yearly meeting on the mainland is the good and the long-life of the Highland song. Beginning some twenty years before,[2] to this end were formed the Highland Choirs that are now to be found pretty well all over the Highlands and Isles, and in such Lowlands towns as Glasgow and Edinburgh, where are Highlanders. These use collections noted both on the staff and in Tonic Sol-Fa, with of course the twists and turns cut out. . . . "As though you were to fit a statue into a box by taking off the nose and ears," said Father Allan.

Every year in the autumn, these last twenty years,

[1] Maud.
[2] This was written in 1906.

these Highland Choirs have met for their prize-singing at the *Mòd*, wherever that may be. Dundee it was, the year that I attended it. Here also come the poets, the harpers, the fiddlers, and those who take the tune at *céilidh*—or the verse at a waulking —*with themselves* (alone). And surely these last would be allowed their own way with it at the *Mòd?* Not at all. Is it a wedding, the *Mòd*, or a waulking whatever, for each to be lilting as likes him? At the *Mòd* must each sing like the other, and all by the book. Not thus, then (the way of a girl I overheard singing in the Hospital scullery at Dalibrog, while rubbing at her board):

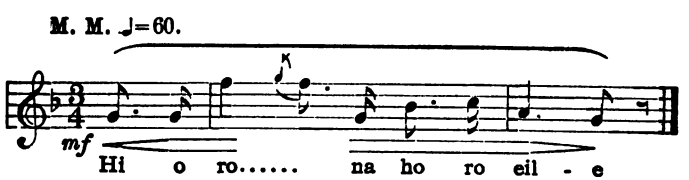
but thus:

And this latter, once got by heart, takes place of the other forever. So there you have, to Father Allan's thinking, a folk-song "spoiled."

And more and more each year, up to the time when I fell in with him, in all good faith this thing was doing; not only in towns on the mainland, but in

Father Allan's own island no less; outside the track of steamers though it lies, and at all times like to be cut off from Uist even by the winds and tides and mists; whence there is no going to the *Mòd;* where is no other choir than that one hears on a Sunday at the Mass, nor singing from books,—where indeed are no books to sing from. But every year at the fish-curing in the Shetlands, the girls are forgathering from May to September with Skye girls and girls from the Lews, with girls from all over the Highlands and Isles,—*Mòd* singers, some of them. And all too readily the new ways are caught up from them, brought home to be brought forth at *céilidh.* Under Father Allan's own roof wasn't I hearing the grey-eyed girl, who never had been to the Shetlands even, singing after the new fashion:

instead of this,—her old way,—which by luck she had not yet forgotten:



"How *can* you sing it *that* way?" demanded Father Allan.

"But I *like* it!" she protested; "I think it's *lovely!*"

The sooner the old ways were on paper, then, the better, Father Allan thought.

V

Now what might there be in the setting-down of some few songs to take up the time of one woman, with a man and another woman to help her in one way and another, well-nigh from a Lady-Day to St. Michael's?

Well,—in the first place, songs were not all that I got in Father Allan's Island. In the second, the task is not one to be done by day's work. "We're a *humorous* people," Father Allan warned me at the start; "better take us while we're in the humour." One day, then, you'll get a dozen: the next day you'll get none.

Not that they grudge them. "My grannie has a song for you," a little girl said who was taking me about in Uist, one day that I came into her black house.

The *cailleach* was eighty-four and past her singing days, but keen on helping me; clapping me on the shoulder when I got the phrase, so patiently

repeating when I didn't, that I said at last, "I'm sorry to be troubling you!"

Smiling in every wrinkle, she mumbled something that I did not catch. "What's that?" I asked of little Bella.

"She says it makes her *happy* to give you this," replied the child. And again: two girls came one Sunday afternoon while I was with the nuns at Dalibrog, to hear the *clàrsach*. I having played and sung, Sister Ermina said, "Now you must give Miss Murray an *Òran Luathaidh*[1] (waulking-song)."

But nothing at all was forthcoming but giggling and blushing, and bashful looks between them, until I said to ease them, "Och, I know how it is with myself! I never can mind a song when I want to."

"Yes,—it is just that!" responded the elder girl gratefully. "We have plenty, and we will not be home before they are coming to us. But we can't mind them *now*."

"I am sure, if you only could think on them, you would be giving me plenty *Òrain Luathaidh*."

"Yes, indeed! If you will let us know when you will be coming again, we will be thinking on them."

Highland or Lowland, they are all alike. I well recall one of the old Newhaven fishwives, a night I was spending with them, ransacking her brains for a song, and finding none there.

[1] Òr-an Lòo-y.

"Ye're awfu' needin' priggin' (coaxing)!" scoffed another.

"Na, na!" she protested; "It isna *thot*. But Ah canna juist *mind* it."

But only let your singer's hands be busy at whatever work the song was made to sweeten, and the song itself is in his mouth before he'll know he's singing. . . . "If you would only be coming down some time when I'm mending my nets!" I heard a young fisherman say in Father Allan's house, where he had given one song, in his big deep-sea-sounding bass, then found himself aground. And one day later when we took him at his word, he made that good.

VI

So much for the singers. Now for the songs themselves. Such an one as this is soon set down:

'S fhuair mi naigheachd di-Ciadain,
Cùirich mulaid air chiadabh,
'S gun deach' thu dha'n-t-sìorradh,
'S gun do thriall thu do Phàrais.
Ho-ri-no-ho, etc.

I got the news Wednesday,
Putting sorrow on hundreds,
That you're gone on your journey,
To Paradise faring.
Thy mother is stricken.

If you can get any tune at all, you can get that one. But again, as Father Allan said, "A great deal of these people's singing is nothing more to them than just a way of doing it."

I had just then been noting down the Tangle Rime, picked up some days before as you'd pick up the tangle itself on the strand, in course of a stravaiging. We three being once more together and at work, I had put the girl in mind of her promise, and as before she chanted, rubbing her hands *deasal*, to Father Allan's great delight: somehow he had not happened on this sort of song before. He took down the words. "And now," said I, "I'll take down the tune."

"But there *isn't* any tune!" exclaimed the girl.

"Why, yes!"

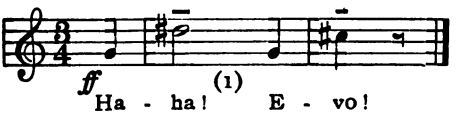
"Indeed there *isn't* any tune in it *at all*," she insisted. "It's just nothing but *rimes*."

"Will I play it for you?"

The turn of her head said *Yes* to my asking and *No* to my thinking.

Against the north wall of the dining-and-sitting-room stood the one musical instrument on the island, barring the trump (the Jewsharp) and a stand of pipes,—a small harmonium of a most grudging disposition. I set to work upon the pedals, and after a little the keys yielded up,

Now, the Eriskay girls have a laugh of their own —something like this:



and they say that in the Shetlands, when girls from all over the Isles and the mainland are fooling together, you may tell the one from Eriskay by that wild laugh of hers. And if I never heard it before, I heard it now.

"Do you *know*," says she at last, and she wiping her eyes on her apron, "I never *knew* I was singin' it!"

It was when she had gone out to look after her bannocks that Father Allan said, "A great deal of these people's singing is nothing more to them than just a way of doing it."

[1] *A* as in *hat*.

That is, of doing the words. Quite as often as not, when you ask your singer for a phrase again, he'll speak it for you. I remember that the young fisherman who gave me his own fine folky way of a Skye song shook his head when Father Allan asked him, Had he it?

"Didn't I *hear* you singin' it?" asked his cousin sitting by.

He shook his head again. . . . "I have only three verses."

And there were two women giving me a waulking-song, who would allow me no choice between

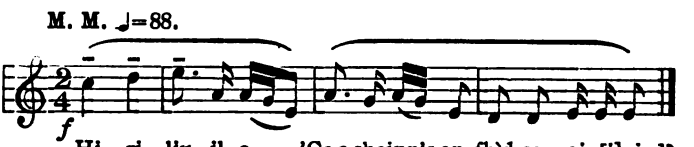
and,

Weren't they the same *words?* Yet they never failed to bring in first the one way, then the other, regularly. Moreover, said the wife of Duncan son of Donald son of Caluinn, "When I am *pulling*, if I get a *word* wrong, the cloth just goes *all* wrong!"

VI

Home-spun like the song itself, and some twenty yards in length (another point of likeness), the web

to be waulked is flung out, dripping wet, on the waulking-board of heavy drift-wood planks set up on stones. Five women sit facing from either side, and when someone of the company strikes up her

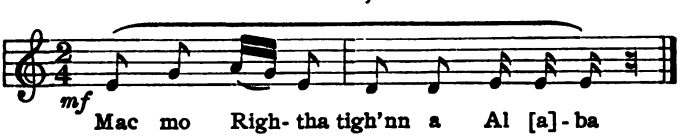


"Who will blow the silver whistle?"

each one of the ten clutches her two fists-full, in time to the tune, to send the web *deasal* round and round. At *One*, she throws herself to right and lays hold; at *Two*, brings it up in front of her; at *Three*, pushes it off to left; at *Four*, straightens up again, and so on; while the cloth, being thumped and rubbed and pulled and twisted by a score of hard-working hands, grows hot and shrinks.

Meanwhile, the company are giving back their

To which the leader answers,



"My King's son is come to Scotland."

176? A

and so they go on with verse and antiphon for some ten couplets. Then the leader strikes into a higher key—the tune goes more quickly—the women work harder. . . . Ten stanzas more, and again the pitch goes up—the work goes faster still. . . . Some fifty couplets in all to a waulking-song, at the end of which the waulkers fetch their breath; while the *cailleach* in authority measures with her Highland yard-stick (which is four feet long) how much the cloth has shrunken, and finally declares, "It will take about four or five songs more."

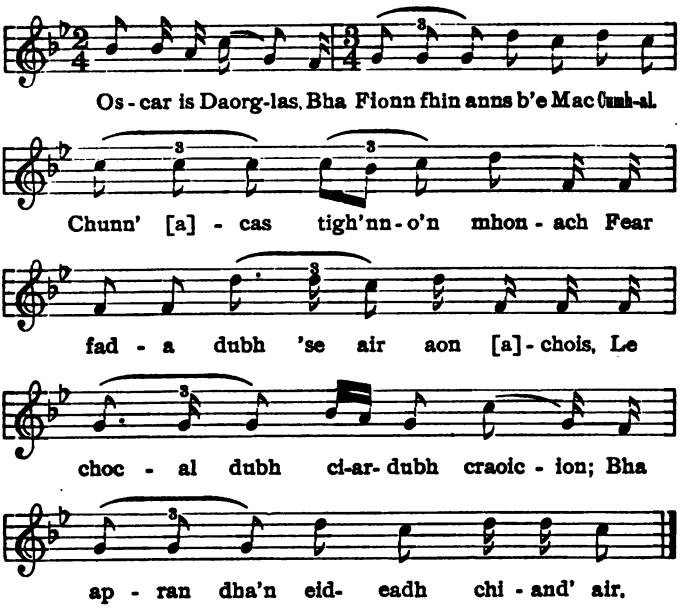
VII

"There's a woman down in the *Baile* can give you an Ossianic Lay," Father Allan announced, coming in one day from scouting.

"Is there a tune to it?" I asked eagerly—this having so far been in question with us.

"She says there's a sort of an edge to it."

As fast as possible—Take breath only when your breath gives out (never mind if that's in the middle of a word), and don't try to make it *sound* too well!


Os - car is Daorg-las, Bha Fionn fhin anns b'e Mac Cumh-al.
Chunn' [a] - cas tigh'nn - o'n mhon - ach Fear
fad - a dubh 'se air aon [a] - chois, Le
choc - al dubh ci-ar- dubh craoic - ion; Bha
ap - ran dha'n eid- eadh chi - and' air.

A day we were at the Hillock of Rushes,
Like five together was our band,
Myself, and Oscar, and Douglas;
Fionn himself was in it, that was Cumhal's son.
All at once was seen coming from the mountain
A long one-legged dark man,
With a cloak of dark-grey skin.
There was a harness on him.

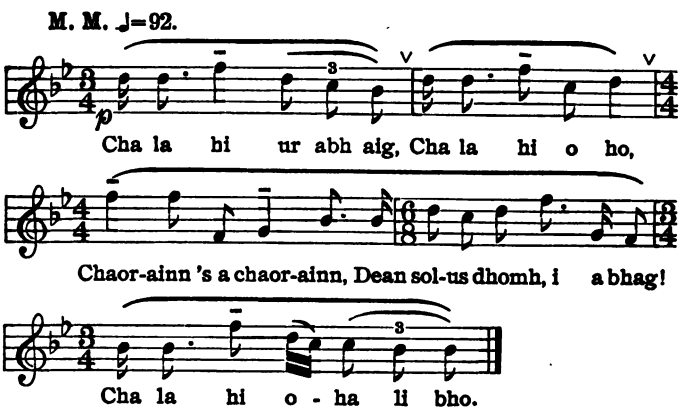
On the edge between speaking and singing I found it, as not only much of song amongst this people, but much of speech itself, so soon as there enters anything of passion into it. "When they come up to tell me of anyone dying or in trouble, they always chant it," said Father Allan, whose own praying was

the same in kind, but who didn't know he did it that way until I told him. Nor are they the deeper feelings only that tend among Islesfolk towards a cantillation. Good company and the comforts of the fire are enough to set a whole roomful to warbling. Time and again, when there were visitors in the kitchen, I, sitting in the next room, would think I heard them striking up. . . . The girl has been putting them in mind of something for me, I would think . . . and all at once they'd drop back into speaking.

So near on the Edge of the World is music to its own far edge—that is, to its beginnings; not yet cut loose from words; no more, as yet, than *just a way of doing it.* And to set down such ways is to deal as it were with the wind in its liltings and in its long whisperings amongst the quicken-leaves, and with the mouthings of the brook in pebbly places. One comes in time to make a good shot at the pitch and intervals—bearing always in mind that the tone is rather that of speech than of song. The puzzle is —where to be putting in your bars.

You cannot make the Gaelic go with the stick without doing violence to the quantities of Gaelic speech, and these are fixed. Long must be long, whether it be sung or spoken; short must be short. Say *céilidh* to a Highlander, within whose house the thing itself is every night, and so you bear not down on the first syllable, he hears you as he heard

you not. Say *bàta*, and he understands a boat; but *bata* is a stick. In an *Òran Luathaidh*, to be sure, or in a *Port-a-Beoil* [1] (Mouth-tune, for dancing to), the liberties of English balladry are sometimes taken; but even in these, or in crooning a child, the natural stress of the words does not always fall in with the thump on the board or the floor, or with the swinging of the mother's body—does not keep step, as it were, though both go along at the same gait, though on the ear they fall combined; just as to the eye there comes the sight of an elm-tree in the wind, the trunk and the greater boughs rocking steadily to and fro amidst the thousand shakes and grace-notes of the lesser branches. For example, this *Òran Cadail na Bothan-Airidh* [2] (Sheiling Lullaby :



Cha-la-hì, etc.

Làs mur gun lòsadh a choinneal dhomh!

[1] Porsht-a-Peel.

[2] Òr-an Càt-al na Bò-an Àrr-y.

Cha-la-hì, etc.

Chùram fear bhroilleach shoillear dhomh!
Cha-la-hì, etc.

"There was a woman out at a sheiling,[1] and her husband had gone to the townland for the night. She was putting her child to sleep. The light coming over the half-door was taken off her. Looking round, she saw a form of a man she didn't know; and she sang this lullaby, asking the embers to light up like a candle; and she sang,

" 'The care of Him of the Bright Breast be on me.'

"He then said, 'It is well for you that you said *that!*' and he went away."

Father Allan was reading this out from his notes when the grey-eyed girl, sitting by, said,—and her eyes like saucers,

"That would be the Water-horse."

"The poor Water-horse!" said Father Allan after she went out: "He gets blamed for everything."

To return to our rhythms: the Islesman has been singing ragtime all his life, as the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was speaking prose, nor knowing he was "doing it *that* way." In noting it, then, why not leave the bars *all* out, as the 16th Century madrigalists did?

[1] Hut at the hill-grazings, whither they used to drive the cattle on the first day of May, and leave them there in charge of the women until September.

Well,—maybe in their day men-and-women-singers had more time to spare—maybe more patience than I. "It's only a matter of arithmetic," said Herbert Hughues, when I looked a bit askance at his otherwise admirable pages in *The Songs of Uladh.* To me, who have no head for figures, his Elizabethan stave is a bit discouraging: I miss the bars, as I should miss the blue *Fs* and red *Cs* from amongst my yellow harp-strings. With the modern staff, then, one does her best; taking care to mix duly her 2/4 measures with 3/4, 6/8 with 3/4 and 2/4, and so on. Otherwise, on hearing this:

one might set down this:

Then someone shall say behind one's back, "The Wounding of the Evil Eye on her! *She doesn't give out the tune as she gets it.*"

VIII

Yet not in rhythm but in mode—in the position of the half-tones in the scale the tune is built on—inheres that quality of Highland music that one will

be calling plaintive, and another mystic, and another weird, according to his own make-up.

Now I grant you the weird and the mystic. Where else, if not on the True Edge of the Great World? And as for plaintiveness, I grant you good measure of that. But to take it in token of the Celtic Gloom. . . . Well,—we'll have that out later.

Now, this quality—weird, mystic, plaintive as you will—has also been labelled Gregorian. And how may that have come there? more than one has asked me. The first answer to hand would be, That the Children of Columcille, who christianised the Islesfolk some twelve hundred years ago, had done the same, at the same time, for their folk-song.

But would that have really been the way of it, there or anywhere? The Church, wherever she has come, has been rather by way of taking-on and making-over, than of casting-out, old ways, old tunes, and old Saints even. And what did *he* think about it? I asked Father Allan.

The folk-song came first, he declared.

And indeed, on going into the matter, one finds authority to bear him out. One finds, in that great web called the plain-song, plenty of threads home-spun, plenty of tunes that, like the *Cradle-song* I heard them singing at St. Michael's, had served the people in their own houses before they served the Church.

But suppose now these were threads in truth—

stout clues to be laid hold upon with hands, and so followed back along the course of years to their beginnings. Whither would they lead us?

To Eastward, to Southward; to Rome and to Byzantium in their great days; to the coasts and isles of the Ægean, to the upland pastures of Judea:

This strand of gold should bring us to a temple wherein one intones the Hymn to Helios:

That other, to the court-yard of a Roman villa, where the cithara is plucked whilst someone sings:

Another still, and no less fair than they, to a way re-echoing a procession "whereon the women and children had best not look":

One again, to a green spot in the wilderness, where a shepherd lad, "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, goodly to look to," keeps his father's sheep; lilting, to pass the time, some stave such as the young folk sing round Bethlehem at home; say, *The Silent Dove in Far-off Lands*, or *Hind of the Dawn*.

One day, when this lad shall be King over Israel, he shall make, and Israel shall sing unto the Lord, new songs to these old tunes.

Again: here are threads of flax and wool. One needs not wind these up to know that at the far ends are fishers and sailors, neat-herds and vine-dressers, —women singing round their houses too. In all, threads plenty. But, sort them as you will, none shall lead you to the True Edge of the Great World.

Yet I think that if the plain-song loom had in its time been set up thereabout, the weaver would have found much the same wools to his woof as elsewhere. And this I think because of what befell me whenever I sang, at home or in The Adjoining Kingdom, the songs of Father Allan's Island.

Here now (said I to myself) are songs such as none shall have ever heard the like of. But no. So far from that, none ever heard them but to liken them. It was never "How strange!" I was hearing, but "How that reminds me——" of Spanish or Danish or Irish, of Troubadour and Trouvère, of Breton or Hungarian, of Maori or Esquimaux or North American Indian or Negro or Kāshmīrī or Hawaiian or Chinese or Japanese, of Old English, or of "something the Swami used to sing." Friends of Vivekananda used to be "reminded" of his chanting in the Sanskrit by Gilleaspuig's *Nuair is Mi leam Fhìn* (p. 236), which Arnold Dolmetsch finds like old English of the 16th Century. Cunninghame Graham finds this Spanish, again; while the potter Applegate has heard singing like to mine in the Kentucky mountains when they're carrying the dead. And when I sing the *Song of the Water-horse* to a Jew from the Baltic Provinces of Russia, he cries, "At last I have heard again a *Karait!*" Now, did I go to the Edge of the World for *that?*

But when I am looking for myself into the songs

of Spain, the Indian *Raga*, and the rest, behold!—I am myself "reminded":

Let a man sing of "*Amor*," or of "*Gaol*," or of "*Lyubit*," it is much the same sort of a tune that will do him, whatever his tongue, for a love-song. And why not?

For when all men were of the one speech and the one language, each might be taking his own way of the tune as now, but it's odds they'd be singing the one tune:

And when men's speech was confounded, and themselves scattered over the face of the earth, why wouldn't they be taking their old tunes along, and making up new words to them in their new tongues, as they are doing in the Isles to-day?

So then, wherever these old tunes are abiding, in Spain, in *Innse-Gaill*, or on the Baltic shore or anywhere, shall they not be reminding us not only of some other, but as well that the forbears of us all were once forgathering on the Plains of Shinar?

It's not such an ill thought for these times. Nor need Rome be grudging it, that long before John the Arch-Chanter was sent to The Adjoining Kingdom "to teach the people singing," in the Isles they were singing round the peat-fires songs of a like lilt to the hymns of Holy Church: "come first,"—come out of the heads and hearts of Islesmen before the Cross was raised on Calvary.

IX

Friends of mine—Edinburgh people—had taken a farm-house in a Border shire. When I went there to visit them, I found the children past-masters in the local dialect. It wasn't "Yes, ma'am" when bid to do this or the other, but, "Ah wull *thot*—ut wull Ah no'?" Which was all very well, said their mother, so long as they did not bring it in-doors. . . . "*No Scotch must be spoken in the house.*"

Now I cannot say off-hand for how long it was, but only that it *was* for long, that the Old Modes in music were in much the same case amongst musicians as the guid braid Scots of Berwickshire to-day is on the farm of Monynut. Only for the Church, indeed (wherein they were not admitted under their own names), they must have stayed altogether out-of-doors—that is to say, among the people—well-nigh until to-day. Plain-song and the folk-song—between them they, and they alone, kept life in the old Modes through many a long day when, if a man had anything to say, he must say it, by order of the schools, in the major or minor. And that these were for a time a vehicle sufficient, who shall question? But music, no more than men, could abide forever on its Plains of Shinar.

Like to the Gael who, doing his best with the English, can yet "say it so much *stronger* in the Gaelic"; like to Landor who "thought best in Latin," there

have latterly been music-makers who can "say it stronger" on occasion in a speech esteemed outworn.

So now, in a measure, the Old Modes do indeed enjoy their own again. And whenever, amidst the welter of the modern counterpoint, these lift their old-world voices, are not the ear and the heart too refreshed? I always fancy a deeper stillness falling then, and the folk listening as at no other time. . . . Maybe my likings persuade me. . . . But whether or no the schools can forego the Old Modes, folk-song has no choice in the matter. Change but one-half-note in your Dorian, Æolian, or Phrygian melody: in place of this

Put

and there again you have a folk-song "spoiled."

How then shall it fare at the hands of your collector who has never taken thought outside the major or the minor? He shall set it down not as it is, but as he thinks it should be.

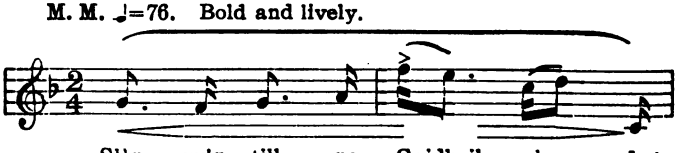
x

But neither must you be extreme to mark amiss some note not in the mode, for your Island singer has a fancy for the *Tierce de Picardie*—for bringing in the major third where the minor would be looked for. . . . "That tune doesn't stay in *any* mode for three bars running!" said Louis C. Elson when I sang him *Nuair is Mi leam Fhìn* (p. 236). There is often, again, a flat seventh which, if the tune were noted in the major, as would seem to be its tonality, would have to be marked by an accidental. For example, the Child-Rimes, on pp. 57, 58, and 60. As they stand there, they are Hypophrygian—founded on the octave of G,[1] using only the white notes of the piano. There is something to be said, I think, for the accidental as emphasizing, to the eye, the strangeness of the interval.

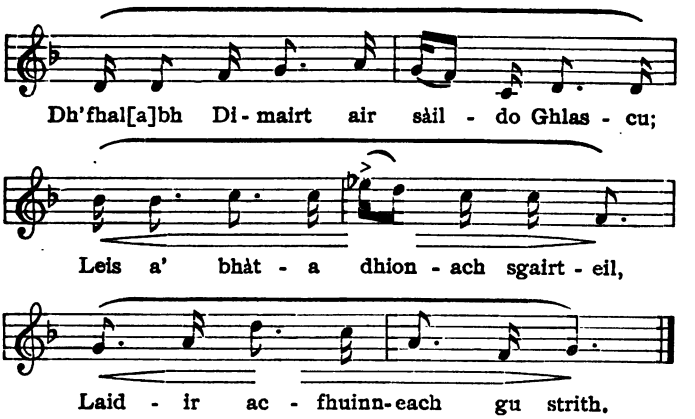
Again, there are major tunes where the flat seventh occurs as a variant, as in the "immutable system" of the Greeks:

For an instance:

M. M. ♩=76. Bold and lively.



[1] Transposed.



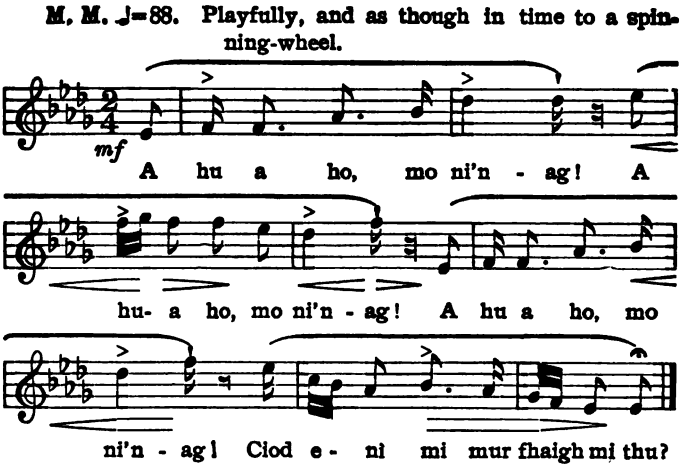
Safe sailing to the handsome Gaels,
Off to Glasgow on the Tuesday,
With the safe and lively boat
Stout and strong for striving.

This weird air would be Hypodorian but for the C ♯.

M. M. ♩=76. In a mournful croon.
'Smi am shuidh - e'n so - m'on - ar, Air -
comh - nard an - rathad; Dh'feuch au faic - mi - fear
fu - id - an, Tigh'nn o Cru-ach-an a' che-òth - aich.

I am sitting my lone
At the side of the road,
When I saw (*sic*) the wretch coming
From Cruachan the misty.

This, while without accidentals, is, like many another, quite vague in tonality:


M. M. ♩=88. Playfully, and as though in time to a spinning-wheel.
mf
A hu a ho, mo ni'n - ag! A
hu- a ho, mo ni'n - ag! A hu a ho, mo
ni'n - ag! Ciod e - ni mi mur fhaigh mi thu?

A hu-a-ho, my lassie!
What to do, if not to get thee?

While for jumping from one key to another without so much as a beg-pardon, commend me to the *Port-a-Beoil* on p. 171.

XI

Skill in the Old Modes, then; an open mind towards accidentals; quickness at the up-take of

rhythm,—having these, what's to hinder one from giving out the tune as he gets it?

Nothing, one might suppose. And were the collector Highland-born and of the people, so much the better surely; for thereby good store of songs were his, and that folky way of singing them whereof the alien must possess himself—and that not easily—before he sets them down. Song, *rann*, old-word, and bardic phrase—the child of the black house "takes them in with the peat-reek," as I heard a Glengarry man put it.

And yet, for very nearness, he is somewhat like to hold them—or their homeliness at least—less dear.

How vexed she was, the grey-eyed girl, one night when Father Allan and I went home with her to *céilidh* in her mother's house and would not have the lamp lit, to spoil the ruddy flicker on the faces round the fire, to drive the shadows out of the corners and the cabars. . . . "It's no better than sitting in a *cave!*" I heard her grumbling.

Let one of a like temper turn collector, and plenty shall he find to change, plenty to leave out; nor will he have to do with all sorts either. Said one (and of whom I'd thought better), hearing rumour of a prize to be offered at the *Mòd* for *Port-a-Beoil*, "They'll be giving prizes for snapping our fingers next!"

But not for him nor for his like am I concerned to speak; certainly not for the collector Highland-born, but with perspective,—would that his sort were in-

creasing! I speak but for the alien—one with maybe a drop of the Highland blood in her. For such an one, to waylay the tune the first time it goes past is not so easy as it might be.

Yet to halt your singer, to turn him back, to make him in any way self-conscious, is enough to throw him off his way altogether. Having come by it with little thought, so soon as he begins to think, he will leave out something, put in something, take the high turn instead of the low, or the other way round, nor know he does it. Nor shall you help him out by telling him he didn't do it that way before. . . .

> "Instinct right, reflection wrong,
> When you get a man to sing a song,"

Father Allan used to say.

I was in luck, then, to be under the same roof as one of my best singers, and she always lilting at her work some one or another of the sixty-odd she was in train of giving me; what time, when she didn't know she was *doing it that way*, I was always listening, always picking up another and another wee note to enrich what was already on paper.

To prove these by singing to my singer, I would first let a little time go by. What with this, and with hearing of others meanwhile to drive the first ones out of mind, I could be fairly sure, when reading from my noting, that my memory was not helping out my tongue. A way that, moreover, somewhat more to the mind of a "humorous" people

(though never so willing), I think, than to be taking down the tune afresh. Which would be well enough, of course, with a singer well used to dictating, and most-like a saving of one's face. But unto the Edge of the World had come as yet, in my time there, little rumour of singing for any use than for the singer's own good pleasure. Now, to be seeing before himself the job he thought was behind him, is a thing to please neither *Sasunnach* nor Celt. And what else would you call it, to be asked to give out the same tune two days running?

While to sing it himself on the one day, and on the other to have the chance of seeing whether or no the stranger was *giving it out as she got it;* to hear it, moreover, all set off with chords on the *clàrsach*, or —better still—with what the grey-eyed girl was calling "the wee notes (tremolo),"—what could be more entertaining? "Isn't it *nice!*" the girl would cry, when she heard played on the harmonium the tune she had been singing: "I didn't *know* it was so nice!"

Furthermore: if when taking down you ask your singer, "Is it *so?*" "Och, yes!" he will answer you gently; thinking all the while to himself, It will not be just his own way, to be sure, but no doubt it will be as good a way, whatever.

But when you are taking the tune and the floor to yourself, if you have not the former just as he has,

all his manners will not hinder him from looking a bit doubtful.

XII

Just here might be coming in the question of one's own manners.

"*Aithne bhliadhna aig fear na-h-aoin oidhche*—a year's knowledge entirely at the man of the one night," do I hear someone say? Well,—I've another old-word for him, "*Thig rì uair nach tig rì aimsir*—there will come in an hour what will not come in an age."

And why, for fear of old-words, should I forbear to further, if I may, the work Father Allan had at heart? It is little of that, at the most, I may hope with my own hands to do. Others will come to it, I trust, and haply aliens like myself; so bound to be coming and going as the sea-ware; yet standing, because of their errand, in need of such insights as come but of long sojourning. Alas, that these shall find no Father Allan there to help them out as he helped me!

Time was and he himself was a new-comer in the Isles, and glad to take counsel, Highland-born though he was, of one who had been there long before him. "There are two kinds of priests that don't get on well with the Islesmen," this one warned him; "those who make themselves too friendly, and those who don't make themselves friendly enough."

And this is a hint for the layman, in search of song or *sgeul* or Celtic Gloom as may be.

Of the two kinds, those who make themselves too friendly would, I fancy, be the more. These, then, might bear in mind to their own furtherance the traditions of the clan—how, in the old days, each one had his place. And these persist. Therefore, you shall not recommend yourself by letting yourself down, in speech, in manners, nor in dress; as who should consider his best were too good for his company. Anent this last, I had my lesson on my second Sunday, when I took the notion to go to the Mass bare-headed; having marked, on the Sunday before, that the women all went either so or in their shawls.

"Eriskay is no place for hats," Father Allan had warned me at Dalibrog. However, I had come in one highly approved by the grey-eyed girl. . . . "It's such a *respectable* hat!" So covered, I received (as I have to be telling later) my first thrill from the music at the Mass. But the next Sunday morning, when I came down arrayed for church-going, I left up-stairs not only my hat, but, as I was soon to learn, in some sort my respectability as well.

I felt the girl's eye on me while we waited in the kitchen for the bell to be done ringing-in, but she said nothing until I stood up. Then, "You're not going to wear your hat?"

I told her what I had in mind.

"I think you *should*," she declared. "You see,—*you're* a *lady*."

No compliment intended. Merely a statement of my degree, and of what became it.

XIII

Those who do not make themselves friendly enough are maybe not so many. But while one may hold one's self not over-high—nor even high enough—as "lady," or whatever, one may as musician. Let your singer be knowing what you are about, then; there's no better way of ridding yourself of *blàs na Beurl'* [1] (taste of the English) in your own giving-out. While a laugh now and then at your expense (you laughing first yourself, of course) will make you and your singer friends as nothing else will.

This helped me more than once to a sett of the words that were in Father Allan's note-book.

Since he had written them down, the people who had sung them were in great part dispersed; some were dead, some gone away, some—like old Cairstinn in Uist, who had been a famous singer—too old to give out now the tune as they in their young days had got it. . . . "If only you had heard her twenty years ago!" Cairstinn's step-son lamented; "she would have made you weep, and you could have

[1] Plaș na Pałe.

heard her a mile." But now her tunes were weathered down all to the one tune—had lost the *caoin* (edge), as the people say. And the worst of it was that, as she somewhat proudly claimed herself, no else had them any more. A robust *cailleach*, Cairstinn; when I first met her she was coming from the herding, a sickle in her hand, a bundle of grass in her oxter, and she turned of eighty. And not for the best song in *Innse-Gaill* would I forgo the memory of the evening in her black house at Kilphedir.[1]

When we had conversed for a little, "Well, Miss Murray! I'm sure you didn't come just to *sit*," said her step-son, smiling. A "good boy," the nuns called him, turned of thirty though he was but a bachelor still. And a good host he was surely. "I know as well as anybody what *other* people would like in a house," he said, by way of apology for theirs; but in his genial face, set off with fair hair and a broad beard that grew curling, there was no embarrassment. . . . "I know you didn't come to *sit*," he said; and soon I was doing my best, between firelight and the glimmer of the little tin lamp stuck up against the partition, to set down a tune that had lost its edge indeed. My Grief! . . . "If you have the Second Sight, you'll need it now," laughed the young man, and I peering at my paper . . . and something extra in the way of hearing would not have been amiss. . . .

[1] Kil-fèet-er.

Many the good hour I had in such another house, both first and last, and counted them well wasted. But one does not fill one's music-book that way.

The best way is to get the tunes from the young people, providing these have learned them from the generation before, and not from girls that have been to the *Mòd*. A girl gets them from her mother while the elder has still the heart and wind for the high notes and the twists and turns. When her strength fails, you'll find her "makin' it easy for herself," as she says; while her daughter will give you the tune as she herself would were she young again.

Such a daughter is not always to hand. You must take the tune, then, where and in what way you can get it.

XIV

And it's something of an ordeal, let me tell you, for even the best-voiced among them to give it you. Not but that they carry it off well enough; the women, their hands folded in their laps, sitting so composed and smiling; the *gillean*, when they come in, putting forth with such good grace their brown hands, broad and hard from rowing, that one would never suspect the cause of their cold clamminess. . . . Would that be from their sitting in the boats all night? I was simple enough to be asking Father Allan; who replied, in some surprise, *he* had never noticed it. . . .

None but a well-considered singer will dream of lifting his voice before company, unless under cover of a chorus. I saw a fine manly young fellow go quite white, one night at *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn*, and his eyes were piteous as he looked at his mother and round at his neighbours, while she held forth at him eloquently—to what purpose I did not divine in time to save him. For at last most ruefully he raised a tune no one else had "the right way of." . . . "He *never* would have done it, only for my mother just *makin'* him!" declared the grey-eyed girl, his sister, on our way back to *Rudha Bàn* that night.

But a chorus soon comes together in a black house, once singing is to the fore. How else could it be, with the door standing back against the wall most times, and neighbours so handy? There were but three of us one night when I started in to get the sett of a certain *Òran a' Phiuthair* [1]—Song of the Sister—that was in Father Allan's note-book; the *bean-an-tighe*, brown-eyed, baking bannocks against the morn's morn, when some girls were going off to the fisheries at Yarmouth; the woman who was to sing, and I. "I don't know how much of a singer she is," Father Allan had said doubtfully. But no one else in all the island had the tune. And now, the night before I was to go, she had just got back from the Shetlands.

[1] Òr-an a Fyù-ar.

The song had words to take the fancy—a dead sister warning the living one in a dream:

"Sister dear, are you sleeping?—you were better to be waking.

When you rise in the morn, your great cow-byre will be flaming, and your man lying dead on your bed.

The brother we had in Ireland was put on the stakes[1] yesterday.

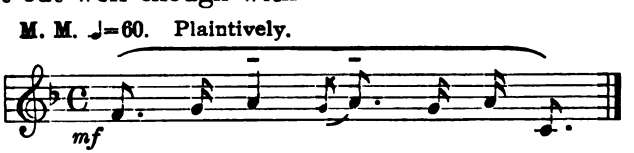
I was there and they not seeing.

A while a-foot, a while a-horse-back, a while in the mist, and I not seen.

Isn't it a pity of me that I lie straiked, and not the strength in me to comb my head?

It's my time to be going back to the Great Place of the wide floor, and the men laid out in it one by one."

This is "stronger in the Gaelic." The tune, too, set out well enough with



Then the notes began to go sometimes more flat, sometimes less: at the end the voice tailed off into speaking. How should I be singing them myself—as in imitation, or as in correction? Either held the germ of offence. Yet here I was expected not only to get something, but to give it out again. . . . What then to do? . . . While I, looking hard at my notes, turned this over in my mind, the room filled up without a sound. Men, women, and children were everywhere when I looked up.

[1] They carry the coffin on stakes in the Isles.

Now, to sing for Highlanders or Islesfolk—or Lowlanders either—is a pleasant thing. I've seen me at a quarry-man's in Ballachulish,[1] after Donald's working-day was over, sitting first with him beside me, touching elbows at the table, and a book of Gaelic songs before us; I singing and he "learning" me. . . . "I want ye to get it juist *proaper*," he would say when he had to correct me, touching gently the back of my hand with his big finger, smooth from working in the slates. . . . When the lesson was over, Mary, his wife, would ask, Would I mind if a few of them were coming in?

"No, indeed!" I would answer; when the door would open, and they'd fill the place. Then Mary would let down the window at the top, that those who could not get inside might hear; I'd see them standing there in the rain for an hour or more.

I had not much of the Gaelic those days. In the mornings, I'd go up along the brae-side, over against Loch Leven, and sit down amongst the heather, to be practising what I was "learned" the night before. One time I was repeating *laoigh*—a test-word (it's well-nigh impossible to put the sound of it on paper)—pretty loudly . . . when I heard a step behind me. . . .

I must say that I felt a bit foolish. But when I looked round, why,—it was nothing but a sheep.

So, then, it would be "English" songs I sang them,

[1] Bal-a hòo-lish.

as they said. . . . It used to sound a little oddly to me when in Skye at weddings, someone would get up and say, "Miss Murray will oblige us with an *English* song,"—for what I'd sing them would be *Charlie is my Darling*, or, *The Crook and Plaid*, and such-like.

Well!—those were good and pleasant days. But to be set up, as now, before a roomful, to catch what is not to be caught—and you with a bit of the Highland pride to your own share—is altogether otherwise. My voice was hardly free from "English trilling" (that's another story still to tell) when I raised it at last. . . .

Well,—anyhow I did my best; and when I got all tangled up in my *O-hill-i-hos*, for nervousness I burst out laughing. . . . That was all they were waiting for. . . .

Now, what breaks the ice like a good laugh together? The laugh was on *me*, moreover. So, after that, all friends as we were, and all helping me, I got the tune after all. And when the woman, seeing me to the door on *Rudha Bàn* that night, said, "I'm no singer," it was with a smile.

XV

That night I had gone down alone, for a wonder. Some girls going off the next day, Father Allan was hearing their confessions. Only for that, he had

been at hand: seldom would he fail at such a time. But not to sing himself: "I haven't the folk-song *sound* in my voice," he would say. "I didn't learn the songs when I was young, and now I can't make them *folky*." But many the folky turn and twist my songs would be the poorer for but for the quickness of his ear, and many the note that would have slipped by me but for him. Nor was that the sum of his helpfulness. One may, of course, set down the tune without the words; but never so fully, to my way of thinking, for want of the delicate syllables to guide the ear. Here Father Allan spared me thought and time, and guesswork too.

Now and then it chanced that, in his eagerness to help, he hindered. To my shame I confess that at such times I'd almost be wishing that "Father Dornin" had come in his own stead. *His* grace might have sufficed for him—so did not always mine for me . . . But Father Allan always understood.

Did *he* ever feel cross? I asked him once, after a trying sitting.

Of course he did! he answered heartily.

XVI

So, as seen, it would sometimes take the time of three to get one of these songs set down.

Well,—and what are you going to do with them? I am asked; there being those who reckon all folk-

material going to waste unless in one way or another worked up.

Now again there are others who see no such great necessity; who think it would go hard with any *seannachaidh* (story-teller) to better the telling of the *Story of Deirdre* by Iain, the brother of Angus, as set down by Carmichael; who like their Highland music as the Highlander prefers to take his whisky —*mar a tha e* (as it is). Not but that the songs sound well—and even grandly—harmonised for four-part singing. . . .

And yet—to get a man out of his own old way of it, is that to save the song? To make but a *Sasunnach* holiday, is the song to be—shall we say kept alive?

XVI

In 1901, I sang for Sir A. C. Mackenzie some airs I had picked up a little while before in Skye.

"What accompaniment are you going to give them?" he inquired.

"None, I think."

"That's a mistake," said he. "*My* ear, as I listen, supplies the harmony. But you won't find them making much of an effect generally unless you give them some sort of a background."

So I got me my *clàrsach*, my little harp of twenty-eight strings, that is like Queen Mary's at the Royal Antiquarian Society's; and have kept to this, and to

such chords and figuration as the diatonic scale admits.

Now, as for singing these songs to the piano: if any Highlander who wearies of his music *mar a tha e* has the notion that "a few simple chords," struck heavy-handed, are any enhancement of it, let him be making these up for himself. For the alien artist there are collections in which the home-spun melodies, arranged to well-contrived accompaniments, take on a gentility that sets them no ways ill—I'll say that much for them. If I feel them thereby in some measure robbed, as in some measure gifted, that's not to grudge any other one his pleasure in them.

But . . . why put the songs in reach of all and sundry, and not one in a thousand with the folk-song sound in his voice? I say, leave them for the people.

And in no sort do these so differ from the singer schooled as in the show they make of their own feeling. Your Island treble will pipe you,

"You took the moon from me;
You took the sun from me;
You took the sky and the East and the West from me;
You took the heart was in my side;
And great's my fear you'll take my God from me,"

as though she were the robin in the April dawn,—so sweetly wild, so fresh, so well-nigh sexless the sound of her singing.

Nor was it otherwise—unless for a quality of weirdness—with the voice of Ruaraidh's wife—the deepest-pitched of any woman's I have ever listened to. . . . "She has her *own* voice," said the grey-eyed girl, when I had praised it to her; she coming herself from *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn*, where the fancy is for warbling high and shrilly. . . . Nor again with Gilleaspuig's beautiful wood-wind bass, quite perfectly produced in Father Allan's kitchen; though in his boat, with all the Kyles before him, some tones got away from him a bit. Not these, nor any Highland singers ever I heard (off the platform), put much of themselves into the song.

But all the more for that the folk-song spell was in it; the spell that in the narrow compass and rude forms of our ancestral song abides for us—can lay bare, in the deeper layers of our selves, the marks of old ancestral tides long since ebbed out—can bring to the edge of recollection what was by-gone long before our day—can waken the nameless and numberless memories of our race.

At its command, the ghosts of our dead forbears' passions rise and walk within us, to show us no ways wiser nor more wary than themselves,—caught fast, for all our cleverness, in the same coils as they.

But only put a little "style" into it . . . and away go spell and all like ghosts at cock-crow.

The people know this. "I don't like that *English trilling* in the voice,—do you, Miss Murray?" asked

of me a girl from Eigg, who sang beautifully in the folky way. "I like it in the English," she added politely, "but I think the Gaelic should be sung just plain." [1]

Which is just what the trained singer, wanting the folk-song sense, won't do. The better the singing, the better for the song, he argues; and once it would have ill become me—prize-winner at the *Mòd* myself—to gainsay him. Once it was, and until I came to the True Edge of the Great World, that I mistrusted nough amiss with me.

But there where the in-dweller has The Sight of things unseen, the stranger's inner vision, and his inner ear as well, are like to be in some way sharpened. I was not long in Father Allan's Island but I was hearing what should not be in my own voice, and in the voices of the people something not to be attained by English trilling.

Wholly now to match my way to theirs could hardly be. For into the trained voice raised before a roomful will aye come the sound of self and of

[1] To be sure, when she gave me *Flora MacDonald's Song*, she said, "My aunt [who had taught it her] told me, 'Now, Morag!—see that you sing that with *expression*.' . . . She wanted me to make it just *powerful*," she explained. . . . However, that's another thing from English trilling.

As to what they think of this latter, Father Allan had it from one of his own men he chanced to fall in with, coming out from a concert in Oban. The principal singer had sung "with expression," and a strong vibrato, a Highland song. "And how did you like it?" asked Father Allan.

"I think it would be ferry hard on her chest," answered the other cautiously.

sophistication, and of something extra to the content of the song.

Best of all, then, I like to be crooning them over and over not for others' hearing, but as though I were one of my own far-back forbears in the Highlands lilting at her wheel.

XVIII

Who, then, shall such a collection be serving,—the composer?

Time has yet to hatch out one who is Highland as Grieg is Norse, Mussorgsky Slav, and Liszt Magyar. From Saga days to these, the genius of the Highland Gael has served mainly to quicken the genius of the Stranger. But is this so to be, world without end? Does there not inhere in Highland song, over and above that ancient universal quality that so "reminds" us, some quality recognizably apart from that of Ireland's even—distinct and distinguishable as that of the Norseman, the Slav, or the Magyar? I think to single out the makings of a master in it. Would that he had come in Father Allan's time! He had had a better welcome to his island than Prince Charlie's was.

When he shall come at last, I trust there may be something for him between the covers that I filled, and in many another book to be set down by other hands than mine.

Whether he shall build on themes that he shall take outright, that is of course for him to say.

But I incline to think that he shall come to his own folk-song rather as to a spring for his refreshment than as to a quarry for his blocks.

The best that we can do for him, then, is to see such springs kept running clear.

Just suppose that those old ancient African images we're seeing lately had been tinkered to make them more seemly before we had sight of them! . . .

But not unto the end of music-making was it that Father Allan so desired to see the songs set down, as that the home-keeping Islander might not cease from singing in his own old way—every man for himself, and no *Sasunnach* listening;

That he in time to come might leaf the page and say, *This* is the way of the tune as my mother was singing it under the cow, and my father in the boat, and the neighbours round our fire at *céilidh*.

THE "OTHERING" OF THE WEATHER

In such employment, glimpsing all at once the sun-down looks outside, Father Allan would jump up, saying, "Come,—we'll get a mouthful of air!" He catching up his cap and I my *breacan*, in another minute we'd be out; most-whiles going down to watch the ebbing of the tide and the sea-gulls foraging and screaming at its edge. One day we spied a pair of young seals playing tag along the shallows close in-shore;—"A thing I never saw before," said Father Allan.

Now when it comes to sailing, round the Isles or anywhere, I like to chose my day. But set me on shore, and there's none so dull nor so shining but can please me. So, too, it was with Father Allan. I do not recall our out-goings ever ordered by the weather, then; we sat in-doors when it was fine, or walked abroad when it was smirring, in high wind or in low, as Father Allan's humour was for walking or for sitting or for smoking—for which last there was just one place out-of-doors. Within the walled croft to the west of the house, on an old waulking-board raised on rocks, back to wind and

face to sun, we would sometimes be sitting for an hour after dinner—"where the wind won't smoke my pipe for me."

Time again, we sped before the wind from the wall to the edge of the foreland, or struggled back against it with a will as good; or paced a sheltered strip at the mouth-side of the chapel. And from thence I've seen a sail-boat tacking on the Kyles below for a good hour, to make the harbour. Showers would sweep northwards between us and *Beann Sgrithean* and never wet us; would sometimes leave him misty as before, would sometimes strip him, streak him down with glittering runlets; here and there a boulder sending back a flash as from a shield.

A grey and lonesome-looking thing, the shower that passes in the sunshine with itself. Coming in at the back gate of the chapel-croft, one warm still sunny day I spied it, and stood there between the peat-stacks to see it cross the Kyles.

For a space where its shadow involved them, Uist hills scowled inky-black: to either hand the sun lay on their length. In its skirts shone a splendid rainbow, and on the water in its wake a stain of green that might have spilled down from the bow itself. The islet in mid-channel, so soon as the fringes of the rainfall cleared it, glowed out in its wetness golden-green; and over the hills to the westward the shadow of another rain-cloud—sent by a higher roadway on another errand—ran like a deer.

"It's a queer day we don't see a rainbow," I remember Father Allan saying. Twice running, we saw it by night.

It was in the week of harvest-moon, a little rainy. We were sitting after supper by the fire, while the girls were gone out to see a neighbour home, as girls' ways are—and men's too—in the Isles. . . .When suddenly they burst in, breathless, gasping, "Come quick—quick!"

We lost no time in getting out, to see, amidst the flying shower and broken moonlight, the wraith of a rainbow hanging frost-white, melting as we gazed. . . . "We were seeing it down in the harbour," said the older of the girls; "and *here* we were running, running!—before it would be gone."

Next night we sat again by firelight, with the rain still at the window. It slackened, and we looked out.

The wrack was driving fast across the moon, and she, just up from behind the hills of Barra, silvered now one edge and then another as it passed her, but never showed her face. "She will shine out directly," said Father Allan. Leaving the blind up, we came back to the fire-side, where he fell to telling of old holidays in Spain. I had my little harp between my knees; now and then I fingered it and sang.

The rain came on suddenly again, beating now at the panes with such fury that I played no more, and listened poorly while Father Allan, nowise put about,

was describing an altar-piece that he had seen. . . . I looked to see the streaming glasses driven in at any minute . . . when all on a sudden the moon broke through them, in a wonderful pale-greenish watery dazzle. . . . Without so much as a beg-pardon I cried out, "I wonder if there isn't a moon-bow!"

In no time at all we were at the back-door looking out.

The rain still thudded on the roof, though on either hand—so narrow was the cloud—outside the croft the rocks lay in the moonlight. Peering into the shower, we saw nothing more. . . . Then, as it drew away, all at once the great white bow sprang out against it, so near it arched the croft.

For a space, so it stood that we might step beneath it. Then, moving away to Northwards slowly, it overhung the Kyles at last, so melting out into the night.

A bow of promise to the man beside me, bound as he was, and that soon, to the Land of Lasting Weather, it might well have been. But—for anything he said—he thought no more on that than I. What with guessing the height and span of it, indeed, with marking the faint stain of seven colours down at the right foot of it—recalling how his friend in *The Adjoining Kingdom*, who makes and prints a new map of the heavens every year, had said he must come to Eriskay to see the moon-bow—declar-

ing, "We're giving you a moon-bow every night!"—I never saw him merrier.

The rain was back at his old ploy with the panes when I went up, an hour or two later or thereby, and the goblin up the chimney puffing like to burst. Over Barra hills a new cloud, dense and smoky, seemed poured up funnel-shaped as from a crater: a livid patch showed where the moon was hid behind. I wondered, as I pulled down the blind, what the weather would be when I raised it.

Then I set-to on my notes of that day's talk—too slight as they were, and too many, to be left till morning.

My candle was guttering when I blew it out at last and went to window. And now the moon had ridden out of sight: the lift was clear, and swarming with cold white stars. Down below in the *Baile* one cheerful earth-star gleamed—the fire-lit doorway of a black house, where the neighbours still sat round at *céilidh*. All else was dusk and dimness, nor any sound ascending but the soft "*Whist—whist*" along the shore-rocks and the sands.

THE CELTIC GLOOM

I

"*What's* that?" demanded the grey-eyed girl, sitting by with her knitting one day that this topic came up in our talk.

"It's something an Englishman's writing about us," answered Father Allan.

"*How* does he know?" Silence, and she frowning down at the needles clicking in her serviceable hands. . . . Then, "*What* does he know about us anyhow?"

II

Nowadays I can never catch sight of an arbour (nor one of your "pergolas," mind you) but it calls me up a waif-word from that *Pilgrim's Progress*, full of wood-cuts, that I used to dote upon in early days.

Early enough, those same days; and how long since, I'm not telling. . . . I could laugh now to think on that monstrous great pack that was tumbling off *Christian*. Whatever was in it? A Burden of Sin, said my elders when I asked them. And what's *that?* thinks I, who as yet had backed sin nor sorow either. . . .

Well!—the one I liked the best showed just such an arched old-fashioned trellis as I name, overhung with a grape-vine. Underneath sat a youth head on hand and fast asleep. Underneath again one read, "Then he came to an arbour, warm, &c."

And now I never see an arbour but it minds me how that other pleased the child I was. And why?

It's because of a youth who, in a year not long past *Charlie's Year* (the '45), was picked up by the press-gang in the north of *The Adjoining Kingdom*, and taken to fight for King George at Quebec. For it's by my likings late and early (and my mis-likings too) that I know myself, his great-great-great-great-great-great-grand-daughter, to be at heart no less a Gael than he.

Now as for the likings of a Gael: well, it's not for a sleep, neither yet for a feasting to follow would any I know, in Highlands or in Isles, look for his happiness in this world nor the next. Who'd sleep in a black house and *céilidh* doing? The day may slip into the night and the night in the mouth of the morning, nor the fire be smoored, so long as *sgeulan* old or new be to the fore, or songs singing. When in the night as I was telling, the wind made as though he were harping, and the grey-eyed one asked me in the morning, Was I playing? I asked, Did she think I would do such a thing, to be waking them all?

"But I'd *like* it!"

I thought to have a laugh over this with Father Allan.

"But it would be *beautiful* to be hearing it in the night," said he.

"They'd not think so where I came from."

"But the day and the night are not so separate with us as with you."

III

Now, I'm no sleepy-head myself—most things go nowise near so well with me by day as after dark. Not so much, then, for what makes the young heads nod nor waits on rocking is it that I'd fancy sitting in an arbour, as for sake of sitting warm, and so it is too with your Islesman. No Heaven without a thatch to it for him, and four good walls forbye; his own, grey without, black within, were well enough, he'd say. While as for the flooring of it; gold or clay, he cares not, so only there be a good fire in the middle and his neighbours round. In the house of many mansions, give him, if God please, just a black house like his own, "warm, &c."

I'm wondering that the Kirk should think to scare him into Heaven with its threats of Day of Burning. The fire, the good peat-fire, the core of his comfort, the red heart of his black house,—what terrors has the fire for a man who wears the night out in the boats? for a woman who's herding from early to

black and her head in her shawl for face-ache? Those knew them better who preached them an Ill-Place of ice and snow. "Go you North and North and North," says Michael Scott, when the young man in the *sgeul* comes asking him, Would he be so good as to tell him the way to the Place he was wanting to go to?

Michael Scott in an Eriskay *sgeul?*

How he got there is more than I can tell you. But there he is anyhow, who was riding seven years with *The One-we-won't-mention.* And, "All I know is, that the Mouth of Hell is in the North," says he. "Go you North and North and North, until you come to the True Edge of the Great World."

IV

Now I was chilly as a child, and like the fire-end still. So much for so much. Something further than a fancy for sitting warm, or underneath the vine when grapes are ripe, was in me out of long ago, I'll say, for that old picture in the *Pilgrim's Progress* to be taking hold on. For it's what one's wanting that he's wishing mostly, and no want there was of fruiting nor of firing in the plenteous land where I was young.

Yet your Islesman's Happy Otherworld's no Land of Goshen: milk nor honey, I'll be bound, are flowing in his dreams of it, so little as he's blest with

either here. "Which were better with you," asks the *Cailleach* in Father Allan's folk-play, "a drawing at food, or a drawing at music and pleasure in the beginning?" And the *Bodach's* answer, "The choice of the Highlander for me!" needs never a gloss for the Gael.

I fancy a proper *céilidh* comes near to his notion of Heaven as any. "We have seen some poor creatures of them," says the Reverend Robert Reid of Aberfoyle, "chattering their teeth for cold, that how soon they heard the harp, or saw the fire, leapt thorow the hall like goats or satyrs." Yes, the harp and the fire must be in it—but what more he knows not, oh, he knows not (if I know him)! Nor indeed would he thank the one who'd tell him.

For it's not what's told nor written down that glamours him—it's aye the ampersand that's in it.

What sets him to dreaming? what stirs him to roving?

The thing that's un-said, and the want he's no word for. The "and-so-forthness" of what's to follow.

Not warm alone, then, must the Isleman's Heaven be, but "warm, &c." And I'm much of that same mind myself.

v

I hope to see no Celtic Gloom where I'll be going, anyhow. . . . Maybe I've helped that notion on a

bit myself—we all do, more or less, who have to do with Celtic songs. For of these, I grant you, good few of the sweetest are saddest. You can't leave out the *crònan* (lullabies), you see, and your singer with maybe her twelfth at her breast. Small fears of *crònan* dying out in *Innse-Gaill*, for want of weans to cuddle. But a thousand years of fire and sword have gloomed them. For how could the heart of a fighting-man's wife, though never so stout for speeding him when Fiery Cross came round imperative, how could it, I say, but take the low-road after him?—in the mist, in the night, under sunshine or star-shine, how could it but follow? And she at the lonesome fire end far behind, crooning maybe all he'd left her, how should she be merry?

And if there's no more Fiery Cross in these days, still and aye there is the sea, and wives' hearts still go seeking in the night outby, and wandering on the wave. Little wonder that croons in the Isles are like the tunes the wind is whining in the night-time when the boats are out.

Oh, it's all very well for a mother in Gartan to lilt of the hearth-stone and the cricket, with Himself delving safe on the next bog! But in *Innse-Gaill* it's

> "*Ho-bà, mo leannaibh,*[1] *ho-bà, ho-bà,*
> Till the men come again that went sailing."

[1] Lènn-av—darling.

But once he's a-foot, his mother'll set the *leannaibh*, in his little Shirt of Christ (that's all his wear until he's two), upon her knee, and dandle him to

M. M. ♩=106. Brisk and lively, as fast as one can trot a child on the knee.
"Sugh cridh', sugh col - uinn, Rob - ach - an dubh!"
os an fheann-ag; "Sugh cridh', sugh col - uinn,
1st.
Rob - ach - an dubh!" os an fheann - ag;
2nd.
molto rit.-drawling thro' the nose.
os an fheann-ag; Rob - ach an dubh, Domhnuill gur
a tempo.
bòidh - each thu!" os an fheann - ag.

"'Little rough black one, essence of my soul and body!' says the hoodie-crow."

"'Little rough black one: Donald, how fair art thou!' says the hoodie-crow."

And you'll see the *leannaibh* saving up his laugh for "*Domhnuill, gur bòidheach thu!*"—that's made to sound as like the crow as can be.

VI

Love-songs, now: there's plenty of sadness in *them* the world over. But what's to prove by that? When I was a girl, we were all of us singing, "In the Gloaming, O My Darling"; yet I'm sure I, at least, was light-hearted enough.

Would you call these young people pious, then, for their saying "My Gawd"? Why impeach a Highland girl, then, of The Gloom, for her "*Mo Thruagh*—My Grief"? . . . I've noticed that Fiona MacLeod does. . . . And why not, then, of worse, for her "*Mo Chreach*—My Ruin?"

When ROCCABARRA rises (not to tell that twice, I'll trouble you to read ahead, p. 229), and some red-head comes our way "collecting," most like he'll be putting The Gloom on us here in Manhattan for "The Rosary," or such-like.

Well,—there's plenty songs in *Innse-Gaill*, besides the love-songs, that I won't be calling merry. Here's one of them:

"How's my sister betrayed me!
Brown maid so deceitful,
When my brethren you guided
To the fold of the cattle."

"There was a girl, and a young man was in love with her, and her brothers weren't wanting him to marry her. So she was out at a sheiling,—you know?—and the young man would go to see her there,—fine she knew when he would be coming! Well,—he was coming one evening, and she was telling her sister, and her sister was just gettin' it all out of her, the way she would be telling her brothers—do you see? I think she would be a queer *sister*. . . . Well,—her brothers knew when he was coming, and *here* they were watching for him—oh, it's *quite true!*—and they caught hold of him and they killed him. . . . It's a good job that laws came out. Many the life it's saved. . . . It's queer the way things would be in olden times—they didn't care a bit about *lives*."

Thus, the grey-eyed girl that sang the song for me.

Here's the lament of another sister, for her brother who was drowned:

M. M. ♩=92. Steadily, with a mournful monotony.

Cha direach mi bruthach,
Cha siubhail mi buan.

Cha siubhail min-t-achadh,
Na machaire cruaidh.

Cha'n e cumhadh mo leannan,
Th'oran ged a dh'fhanadh e bhuan.

Ach cumhadh mo bhrathair
Cùl fainneach nan dual.

Tha do leaba gun dòigh oirr,
Anns an-t-seòmar ud suas.

Cha teid mi ga caradh,
'S tu ghraidh cho fad bhuam.

'S oil leam diol do chùil riomhaich
Bhith fo mheinn aig a stuaidh.

Cha 'n eil bàt' thig o'n rudha
Nach struthadh le'm ghruaidh.
Hu-or-a-hu-o, etc.

No long thig o'n Chaolas
Nach ciochal mo shunadh.
Hu-or-a-hu-o, etc.

Tha do phrensan nan chistibh;
Ni nach misde mi bhuam.
Hu-or-a-hu-o, etc.

'S tu lamhainn an-t-sìoda,
Gu misdeach a ghuail.
Hu-or-a-hu-o, etc.

Sad indeed am I and sorry,
On the lone and chilly hill.

I'm not climbing on the brae,
I'm not going to the reaping;

I'm not walking in the field,
I'm not straying on the *machair*.

I'm not sorrowing for my lover
Even were he staying from me;

I am sorrowing for my brother,
With the locks of curling hair.

Comfortless thy bed to-night
In thy chamber there below.

It's not I was at its spreading,
Dear; and I so far from thee.

I'm grieving that thy bonnie locks
Should be fondled by the waves;

For the ringlets of thy head,
And the wild foam waulking them.

There'll no boat come round the point,
But will waste my cheek;

There'll no ship come through the Kyles,
But will kill the joy in me.

I've your presents in my chest;
The silken gloves you gave to me;

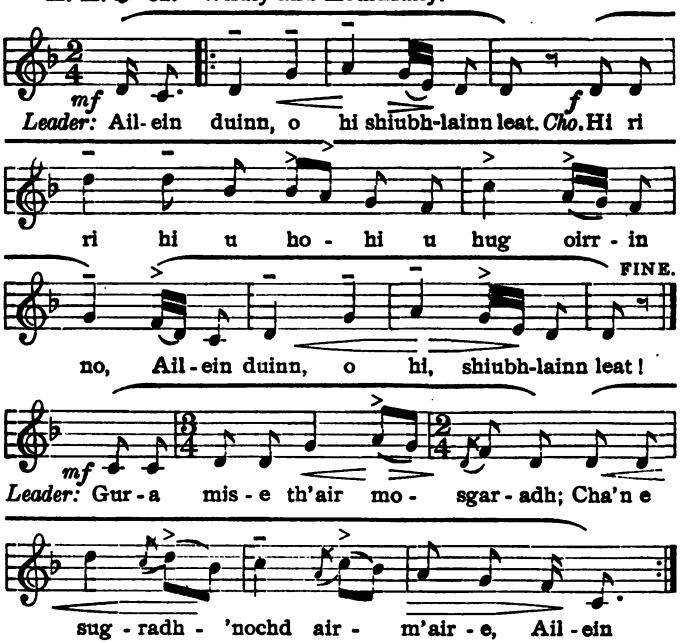
I'll not deck myself with them.
Truly am I in my searing.[1]

This is a waulking-song, but not much in favour with the women for such use, it being, as they put it, too *heavy*. It was perhaps improvised as the others worked. They are quite amongst themselves in the townlands, and no one would think it shame to mourn thus openly before her neighbours.

Another such—lament and waulking-song in one—is, "A song by the daughter of the Man of Scalpa (an Island off Harris). She loved a man who was drowned in the Sound of Harris. She died, and her brothers took her in a boat across the Sound to be buried. A great storm came on. The brothers were talking about drawing lots to see who would be thrown out to lighten the boat. But one said that should not be while the dead were on board. The coffin was put into the water just where Ailein was drowned. A mermaid rose a little way off, and looked at them, and the storm went down. This was in 1751." I copied this, if I remember rightly, from Father Allan's *Sinclair's Òrainiche*. But I got the tune from *Bean Iain 'ic Iain Mhòir*—the widow of Iain son of Big Iain, in Eriskay.

[1] Or "charring." Father Allan named this as a common trope of grief.

M. M. ♩=92. Wildly and mournfully.


mf
Leader: Ail-ein duinn, o hi shiubh-lainn leat. Cho. Hi ri
f
ri hi u ho - hi u hug oirr - in
FINE.
no, Ail-ein duinn, o hi, shiubh-lainn leat!
mf
Leader: Gur-a mis-e th'air mo - sgar-adh; Cha'n e
sug - radh - 'nochd air - m'air - e, Ail-ein

Cha'n e sùgradh, etc.
Ach stoirm nan sianta 's meud na gaillinn.

Ach stoirm, etc.
Dh'fhuadaicheadh na fir o'n chala.

Dh'fhuadaicheadh, etc.
Ailein duinn, a luaidh no[2] *leannan.*

Ailein duinn, etc.
Chuala mi gu'n deach' thu thairis,

Chuala mi, etc.
Air a bhàta chaol, dhubh, dharaich;

[1] The second line of a couplet is often used as the first line of the next.
[2] *Nan.*

Air a bhàta, etc.
'S gun deach thu air tìr am Manainn.

'S gun deach thu, etc.
Cha b'e sud mo rogha cala.

Cha b'e sud, etc.
Ach Caolas stiadair anns na h-Earradh.

Ach Caolas, etc.
No Loch Mhiabhag anns na beannaibh;

Ailein duinn, a laoigh mo chéile,
Gur-a h-òg a thug mi spèis dhuit.

Gur-a h-òg, etc.
'S ann an nochd is bochd mo sgeula,

'S ann an nochd, etc.
Cha'n e bàs a'chruidh 's an fhèisidh;

Cha 'n e bàs, etc.
Ach e fhliuchead 's tha do lèine;

Ach e fhliuchead, etc.
'S muca-mhàra 'bhi 'ga d'reubadh.

'S muca-mhàra, etc.
Ged bu leamsa buaile spreidhe.

Ged bu leamsa, etc.
'S ann an nochd bu bheag mo spèis di.

'S ann an nochd, etc.
'S mi nach iarradh caochlach céile.

'S mi nach, etc.
'S anns bhi leat air mullach slèibhe.

Ailein duinn, a chill's a nàire,
Chuala mi gu'n deach' do bhàtadh.

Chuala mi, etc.
Gur-a truagh nach mi bha làmh riut;

Gur-a truagh, etc.
Ge b'e sgeir no bogh' an traigh thu.

Ge b'e sgeir, etc.
Ge b'e tiurr' am fàg an lan thu.

Ge b'e tiurr', etc.
Dh'òlainn deoch ge b'òl le m'chàirdibh,

Dh'òlainn deoch, etc.
Che b'ann a dh'fhìon dearg na Spainne.

Che b'ann, etc.
Ach a dh'fhuil do chium, 's i b'fhearr leam.

Ged nach teid, etc.
M' achanaich-sa, Righ na Cathrach,

M'achanaich-sa, Righ na Cathrach,
Gun mi 'dhòl an ùir no'n anart;

Gun mi dhòl, etc.
'N talamh-toll no'n àite falaich;

'N talamh-toll, etc.
Ach's a'bhall an deach thu, Ailein.

Ach's a' bhall, etc.
Gur-a mise th'air mo sgaradh.
Ailein duinn, o-hi! shiubhlainn leat.

Brown Ailein, I'd be faring with thee!

Truly am I in my rending. No mirth is on my soul to-night, but rain-storm and heart of the tempest.

Brown Ailein, my darling of darlings! I was hearing thou wert on thy way, in the slim black oaken boat, bound for the Isle of Man.

That was never thy port, but the Kyles of Harris, and Loch Miavag of the hills.

Brown Ailein, calf of my love! How young I set my fancy on thee! My tale is sad to-night.

It's not cruel death everlasting, but the wetness of thy shroud and the sea-pigs tearing thee.

Though I'll be at the sheilings, it's no heart I'll have for it. I'll be taking no other sweetheart—I'd rather the mountain-top with thee.

I heard how thou wert drowning—O had I been with thee!—were it on the sand or the shore-rocks.

Thou'll not be lacking mourning. Were I drinking with my neighbours the red wine of Spain itself, I'd rather the blood of thy breast.

My prayer to you, King of the Elements: that I go not into earth nor into linen, nor into the grave nor any hiding-place, but into the depths where thou wentst, Ailein!

Bear you in mind the dark and smoky room, the thumping and thrashing on the board, the rocking and swaying of the women that are waulking, the tossing and the whirling of the web, the couplets thrown in as outcries between the recurring keen of "*Ailein duinn, o-hì! shiubhlainn leat,*" the steady drive of the wild monotonous tune, rising higher and higher to the end. . . .

Six bars to the one tune, thirteen to the other, nor much of a tune to either, when you play it over on the piano.

Nor again as to the words of it is either song what you would call a well-made thing: the couplets strung together anyhow—no end to it, no middle, no beginning. . . .

But only sing it—sing it!—sing it in the Gaelic. Bring in after every verse the shivering "*Ailein duinn o-hì! shiubhlainn leat,*" or the "*Hù-or-a-hù-o*" that is like the mournful lowing of a cow, and I'll warrant you'll get somewhat for your pains.

You'll sense how the mind goes straying here and there amongst the various parts of grief, and leaps from the one to the other without care for composition, but aye searches back to the core of it.

I've seen me on the railway—of all places—here in my own land, with "business" talking fore and aft of me, women gossipping and children fretting, and town and country flying past the window, and I lilting under my breath, "*Ailein duinn o-hi*," or, "*Hù-or-a-hù-o*." And underfoot I'd have the Isles again, with the sound of the tide in my ears, washing in and out amongst the sea-ware and the shells, and the feel of the mist in my face.

Oh,—I suppose I'm as bad as any of them all, for picking out the saddest of the songs for my own singing!

For there's no sort of use in denying it—such-like sort better with the Isles themselves than those that deal with such brief joys of life as fate and *fuaraidh-froisde*[1] grant the Islesman.

But the Isles are one thing: the Islesman himself is another. So then, to choose out a lament, and think to see the singer of it at his length therein complete, is as who'd view the world by twilight only, when it's neither sunned nor shaded; or by moonlight, when all things in some sort change their shapes.

[1] Foò-ar-y fràws-ja—Winter-storm.

Now your Islesman, take him altogether, shows up well as most by light of common day.

While whoso shall never have seen him by light of the peat-fire at *céilidh*, has seen him as never at all.

CÉILIDH

I

We might be going down some night? I was hinting at the first. But, "You wouldn't want to—the people wouldn't be at ease. . . . I don't like these *manufactured céilidhs*," objected Father Allan. He had in mind some former visitor's experience. But the grey-eyed girl said in my ear apart, "Just you wait until Father Allan goes to Dalibrog."

No sooner was he away, then, than at mouth of the night we were taking the path to *Bùn-a'-Mhuilinn*. And there, in her mother's house, we had what she declared to be "a proper *céilidh*."

II

No one has a bidding to *céilidh*, but none shall fail of a "*Dia bi tiomchioll* [1]—God be about you!" or the like, though he had a man's head under his arm, as the saying is, Aware of this, certain strangers delay not to enter a black house, night nor day, with never a beg-pardon. And so it comes about that "English" stands for "mannerless" in *Innse-Gaill*. For me, I would not be making myself more

[1] Jee-a be cheem-chal. Ch. guttural.

at home there, all at once, than otherwhere; and would be taking my best manners with me, and my best on my back—I have to thank the grey-eyed girl for that last. Nor would I be praising the night to them [1] as I came in, for when that chances fine, the drowned may come ashore. But only let someone be saying, "It's a fine night this!" and back into the water they must go.

And that would be a pity of them surely, when there'd be such warming for their poor cold fingers at the door-way in the reek. For on this night of nights, the *bean-an-tighe*, to be doing honour to the stranger, aye puts on the other peat.

I think that with one of my own in that sorrowful clan there out-by, I'd be sorry myself by the fire. But the gloom of the reek, thick and brown in the corners and cabars, is the only Gloom you'll see. Bright eyes and strong white teeth glint round the circle; the firelight makes rosy what shows something pinched and pale by day. Starving is done with dignity, and even gaily, here on the Edge of the World.

By ones, by twos, by threes, or however, they come dropping in. At last they ring the fire, or sit along the wall, with the old people snug in the warmest corner. The *bean-an-tighe*, though her head is in her shawl, smiles on you none the less whenever

[1] *"Na mòl oidhche, 'us na bemòl là*—Praise not the night, and dispraise not the day." *Hebridean saying.*

you're looking her way. She cards or spins a woolen thread: the other women have their knitting. Between the *fear-an-tighe's*[1] knees he has a pile of heather that he twists into a rope: his sons mend broken oars or such-like. All the men have their little clay pipes: when one wants a light, he will pick up a live coal with his bare hand,—a big one, broad and hard with rowing, though he'll slip you his foot easily into the shoe of a twelve-year-old lad in the Lowlands.

Their names? Macdonalds mostly; a Campbell or two, a M'Innes, and an O'Henly whose forbear came, with other "seven-score out of every surname in O'Cathan's territory" with a noble Irish maid brought over long ago to be wife to a Clanranald. But amongst themselves they're *Gilleaspuig mac, Iain 'ic Dhomhnuill 'ic Ruaraidh*—Archibald son of John son of Roderick; or, *Bean Chaluinn 'ic Alasdair 'ic Chaluinn 'ic Iain Dhubh*—wife of Caluinn son of Alexander son of Caluinn son of Black John; or, *Màiri Nighean Ruaraidh Ruaidh*—Mary Red Roderick's daughter; or, simply,—Mary Red Roderick's Daughter, or, simply, *Oighrig Og*—Young Phemie, or *Donnachaidh Beag*—Little Duncan. And if the former's not so young, neither is the latter, then, so little, for it's this way they name them: the father has the naming of the first one after his own kin, the mother, of the second after hers. If

[1] Ferr-an-ti-ya.

both get the same name, the first is tagged *Mòr* (Big) when the other comes, who gets the tag of *Beag*[1] (Little). There may come yet a third, who'll take over the "Little," while the little one that was will now be *Meadhon*[2] (Middle-sized); though he may be biggest of them all when grown, and *Beag* may wax bigger than *Mòr*. Girls are styled in like manner.

Kin mostly, and more or less intermarried. But one will favour a Pictish forbear, another a Scottish, another a Lochlanner. Their heads are of all colours heads can be—black, red, flaxen, grey, and brown: some folk are tall and big-boned, some are little: one shows a fine upright Roman profile, and another has, from God knows where, his bright dark eyes and heavy brows set slanting over his high cheek-bones like a Mongol. Good looks prevail, both stern and gentle, and eyes that meet yours fairly and friendly. Say what you will against the old clan ways: do you know any like them for giving a man leave to hold his head up? I saw never but one ill-at-ease in a black house, and he was "half-eyed (one-eyed)," ashamed of his disfigurement, poor chap! and holding up his hand to hide it. You'll be wanting your best manners here, to match with these old women who have never left their island nor beheld a tree. And many of the younger

[1] Almost like pek.
[2] May-on.

ones were climbing stairs the first time in their lives when Father Allan, being ill a-bed, confessed them there. When they were coming out, his servant saw them sitting at the top, and so sliding down on their haunches.

But, "while you're taking their measure once, they're taking yours twice," as Father Allan used to say. Sitting douce there amongst them, looking rather in the fire than about the room, making yourself not all at once too hamely, when you hear the talking and the laughing rising higher and higher round you, you may reckon yourself as arrived.

III

Even by the kindly fire-light, the marks of hunger are as plain on younger faces as on elder, and a cast that bespeaks a people thoughtful and God-fearing, in life-long touch with the elements and the Other-world as well. You're on the True Edge of that here, you'll remember. Wherefore to yonder child of twelve or so comes now and again her dead mother. The child does not fear her—why should she? Other two, half-brothers, had a step-mother, a third wife. One of these remembers how she sent his brother one wild evening to the hill, to drive the cow: he went unwillingly, in tears, because he feared to meet the *Fuadh*. Meanwhile she was bathing his sore foot, and scolding him for crying. He heard

a rap at the window, and there was his own mother looking in, and at the partition stood the second wife, who said, "*Tha e a gòrach dhuit a bhi roide ri m'phasda. Cha bhi thu fadan 'a cheann uile gu bi*— It is foolish for you to be cross to my child. It's not long you'll be over him anyhow." And indeed she died soon after. . . . That well-looking man must get himself out of the way before his wife will milk the cow, he having the Evil Eye. . . . And will you notice how that red-haired woman with her hand tied up keeps herself to herself over there?

Last week a neighbour passing saw her house was empty and a cat on the road acting *queerly*. He flung a stone at it and hurt a paw. When he came back he looked in again, and there was the woman with her hand in a clout. . . .

That bearded man *sees things*. They tell how he and four others went to fish for flounders in the Sound between Eriskay and Barra. "When opposite the *Baile*, this man said to one named Caluinn, 'It would be better for you to go ashore.'

" 'Why so?'

" 'Because you don't look well.'

" 'Do you look well yourself?' asked the other with some resentment, for it was a time of famine. There was no more said, and they went to fish; and after catching some, they landed at *Beann Stàc*, and began to roast them on the heather. Caluinn stayed in the boat. Those who were cooking went down

to the boat with some for him, and he was resting on an oar and saying, '*Mo chrìdh*' (my heart)!' He never spoke again. A lad was sent by land to have something in readiness when the boat should reach the houses, but he died that night."

And here's a young girl was beginning the same way. "She saw a vision, so her sister opened and shut the Bible before her face, that the wind might blow in her eyes. . . . 'If it weren't for that, I might be as bad as the Red Tailor of Barra!' . . . Since then she does not *see*, but she can *hear* and *feel* the creak of the stakes, the breath of the bearers on her cheek, and their feet stumbling over hers on the path of a dark night, when the wraith of a funeral-to-be goes by her."

But *that's* nothing out-of-the-way on the Edge of the World, where the dead themselves always pick out what is wanted for their burying. Or that's the way the people put it. Strictly speaking, it would seem the hand of Death himself is in it, since the warning comes whilst those so marked-out are still a-foot. There's a pin for the shroud, say, or a glass for the whisky to be served out to the bearers, in a wooden chest against the wall; nor in their own house, like as not, but in another's. You'll hear a knock within, against the lid, and that will rise and fall again. Or the pipes stowed away on the top of the beds will give a groan, as if someone was

putting wind into them. And it's soon after that they'll be wanted for a burying.

In these treeless isles lumber is noticeable. When they'll see a *shining* on a plank, then, or it leaping from the floor where it was lying at the joiners, someone will be saying, "*Fada goirid gum bi e, theid a tiomchioll air màrbh fhathast*—Long or short as it may be, it will come about the dead yet." And in the chapel-house itself, one night when the priest was away, the girls in the kitchen were hearing a *swishing* in the passage, as though the oilskins that hung there were blowing against the wall. They went to look, but the outer door was shut, and there was no draught. Going back to the kitchen, they heard it again and again. Next day men came up from the harbour for nails to make a coffin.

Now these were in a bag in a closet underneath the stairs, by the door of the scullery; and when it was dragged out along the bare floor, the girls cried out, "*That's* what we were hearing last night!"

"It is certain that he see more fateful and fearful things than he do gladsome," says Reverend Robert Reid of Aberfoyle,—meaning him who is *taibhsear* [1] (seer). One here was away with the dead; another has seen the *Bean-Nighe*,[2] the Washer; this other was chased by the Water-horse to his own door. . . .

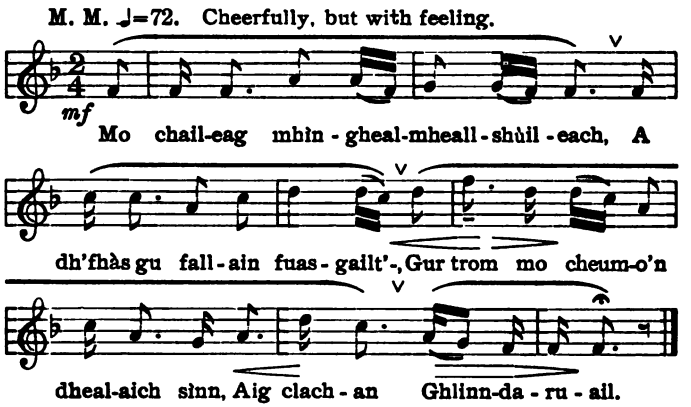
But look well round you for the Celtic Gloom. . . . And where is it at all?

[1] Tàsh-er.
[2] Ben-nèe-ya.

Now the door of a black house, standing open most times as it does, isn't planed on the inside. They give the Celtic Gloom the smooth side of it at *céilidh.*

IV

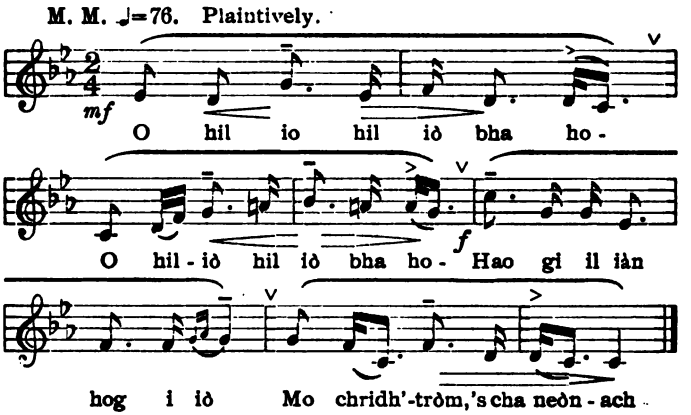
"*Gabh òran* [1] (take a song)!" says someone. And what will they be singing—laments? Not they. Love-songs? Och, yes, to be sure! Here's one I heard sung at a *céilidh* by Iain *Mac* Dhonnachaidh *Bhig:*


M. M. ♩=72. Cheerfully, but with feeling.
mf
Mo chail-eag mhìn - gheal-mheall - shùil - each, A
dh'fhàs gu fall - ain fuas - gailt'-, Gur trom mo cheum-o'n
dheal-aich sinn, Aig clach - an Ghlinn-da - ru - ail.

And though he says he's heavy-footed for leaving her, what less could any lover, *Sasunnach* or Celt?

And now a sailor raises the refrain, "*Mo Chridh' Tròm, 's cha Neònach*—My Heart Heavy, and No Wonder," and the tune of it far from hilarious. But you'll see the men grinning as the song goes on:

[1] Gav òr-an.



'S olc an sign am boghda frois,
A bith anns' a' mhaduinn mhoch;
'S mi bha cinnteach as a chroich,
'N uair a nochdach as na neòil i.

Gu bheil na Sasunnach gu cruaidh!
Gu bheil a Bheurl' aca cho luath!
Ged a chiùreadh a' dhòl nam chluas
Cha tiuginn 'fhuaim seach ròpa.

'Chiaduair dhomhsa dhòl gu feum,
Cha robh sgoil agam na Beurl',
H-uile fear 'na riuth 's na leum;
Is Beurl' aca air gach ròpa.

It's bad the sign, the bow of storm,
Showing in the early morn;
It's myself was sure of harm
When in the clouds I saw it.

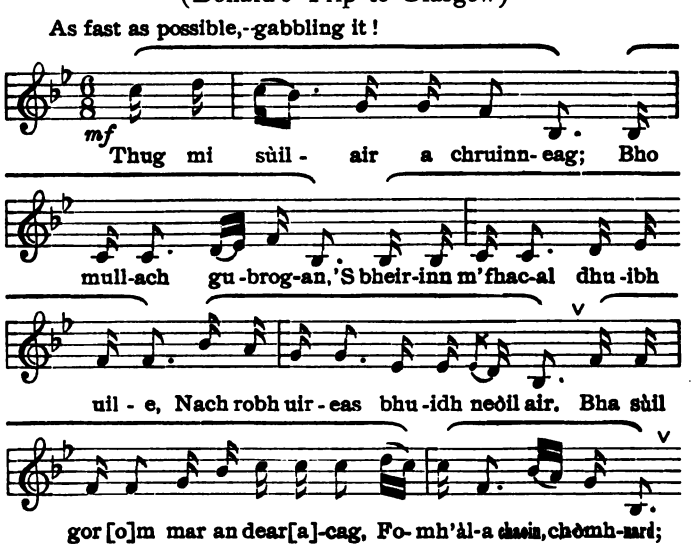
How the Sasunnach is hard!
How swift at him the English word!
I'm not knowing what I heard,
Nor letting go the *right* rope.

When I first went off to sea,
Little English was at me;
The others had it fast and free;
Could English put on *each* rope.

And you're like as not to hear a Crow-song (*Òran na Feannaig*), the "edge" of it old *when the birds had the Gaelic*, and the words made up the night before by Niall son of Iain son of Angus, in his boat. As they pulled in the lines, he'd be lilting it over to himself. Then the man next would be saying, "*A-a-ach!*—that's not so bad. . . . Suppose you sing it some night at *céilidh*."

If that's not forthcoming, then everyone knows

TÙRUS DHOMHNUILL DO GHLASCO
(Donald's Trip to Glasgow)


As fast as possible,-gabbling it!
mf
Thug mi sùil - air a chruinn- eag; Bho
mull-ach gu-brog-an, 'S bheir-inn m'fhac-al dhu-ibh
uil - e, Nach robh uir - eas bhu-idh neòil air. Bha sùil
gor [o]m mar an dear[a]-cag, Fo- mh'àl-a chaoin, chòmh-nard;

I'd my eye on a neat one;
From top-knot to brogues,
Take my word, not a black
Nor a yellow was on her!
Eyes blue as blae-berries,
Under brows smooth and mild;
Her lips and her cheeks
Were as bright as the roses
A-top the twig.

In these *fabliaux*, one vowel is carried through the eight-line stanza. The ninth line sets the vowel for the next, and is drawled out through the nose, in contrast with the gabbling of the rest.

"Bardism," boasts the *Second Bodach* in Father Allan's folk-play, " was running in my family from knee to knee." With that in their heads that they never wasted any time learning, it's no trouble to make up the like for themselves.

"I went once to tell a fisherman's wife that her husband was drowned," Father Allan told me. "She was in bed. . . . 'Och, you needn't tell me your errand!' she said; 'I know that Angus is drowned.' I took her hands in mine—there was nothing I could

say. She raised herself up, and burst out into a chant—three verses of poetry. Then she shook her head a little from side to side, and fell back in a swoon. I saw this again at a funeral. It was at Christmas, and the dead was a young girl. The coffin was on the stakes and they were lifting it; the mother bent over it and burst out into chanting and singing—several lines of beautiful verse. They said to her afterwards, 'What did you say?' . . . and she had no memory of it."

And lesser occasion will move them. One man was ploughing over on the main-land; and as he trod the furrows North to South and South to North, first the one of his splay-feet, then the other, pointed West. So he made a Crow-song to tell how his feet were wanting home to Eriskay. Another gathering kelp, and slipping on the rocks, got the notion of a Crow-song out of his mishaps. Another still, lying bed-fast, was watching the hens going in and out amongst the cups and plates on the dresser. They got on his nerves—so he made a Crow-song about them.

And it'll be a queer sort of a *céilidh* with never a *sgeul*, whether of Fionn and Oisinn and Deirdre and the Sons of Usnoth, or *The Shifty Lad*, or the *Lay of the Red-lipped Maiden*, or *Brambles in Mid-winter*, or the *Lay of the Banners*, or *The Red-haired Squint-eyed Cave-Dweller of the Desert;* and each of them better than other: tales you may hear

in substance the world over, but told with an Eriskay twist; or tales not like to be heard elsewhere,—as (I think) is the tale of "Michael Scott." Some of them never in print, and most of them told by those who could not read them if they were. Ask to hear an Ossianic Lay, and here's one who will lilt you it. . . . "Do you know, Father," said a woman of the Isles, "these *sgeulachdan* were just made up by a woman *who had to save her life.* But the Ossianic tales are true as truth."

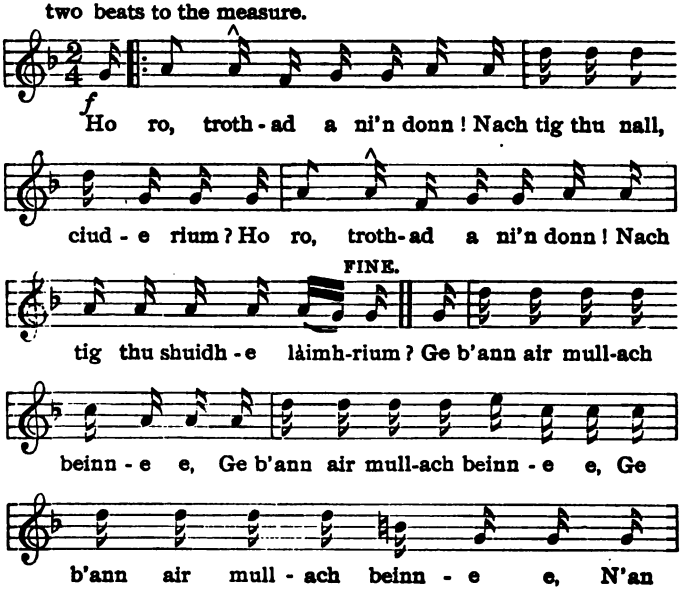
A waif-word out of the *Arabian Nights.* . . . What was wafting it into a black house? As well ask the drift-wood cabars overhead in what wood were they grown, or what wave washed them thither.

The first tale from the host, and tales from the guest until daylight. A good *seannachaidh* will give you up to fifty,—some of these will take a two hours in the telling. And I'd be sorry for the *Sasunnach* that had the job to better them. The wisdom of the old folk is stored up in the common speech of the black houses like the honey in the comb. Old bardic words lie buried in it, as the roots of firs and hazels that once covered hart and hare and wolf and boar in the forests of Old Caledonia, lie buried in the moss to-day. The sweet high-sounding things that only poets and lovers say in the Great World are in the mouths of herd-boys on the Edge of it.

v

And it's very like you'll listen long, nor hear a word out of the way,—though I mistrust the men have verses they don't sing at *céilidh*. I remember one in a love-song Father Allan gave me, saying, "You won't want to sing *that*. It's rather pastoral, you know." Your best chance of that will be when the stools go back against the wall, and the couples stand up for a reel. Then one shall raise the lively *Port-a-Beoil* (Mouth-tune, as apart from *Port-a-Phìob*—Pipe-tune), and all but the dancers "lift under it," while the sea-boots mark time on the floor.

As fast as possible, marking time with the foot on the floor—two beats to the measure.


f
Ho ro, troth-ad a ni'n donn! Nach tig thu nall,
ciud-e rium? Ho ro, troth-ad a ni'n donn! Nach
FINE.
tig thu shuidh-e làimh-rium? Ge b'ann air mull-ach
beinn-e e, Ge b'ann air mull-ach beinn-e e, Ge
b'ann air mull-ach beinn-e e, N'an

Ho-ro, come hither, brown-haired maid!
Won't you come along o' me?
Ho-ro, come hither, brown-haired maid!
Won't you come a-side me
To the top of the beann,
To the hill in the desert?

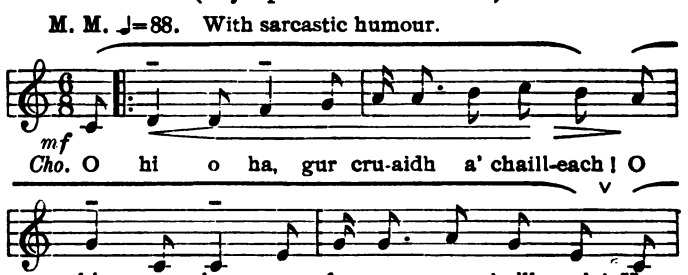
In these there is very likely to be what wouldn't get by the censor.

VI

None will be silent but the girl whose mother died within the year. Though the best-voiced of them all, none will say to her, "*Na 'n tog sibh fo 'n fonn*—won't you lift on the tune?" [1] for respect to the *one-not-remaining*. The old folk themselves will lift stoutly as any, even on such a chorus as to

MO GHRÀIN A' CHAILLEACH

(My Spiteful Old Woman)



[1] Nan tok she fone foun.

re ho ra, 'si ghràin, a' chaill-each !Dh'fhag
FINE.
mis-e 'n am-ad -an gòr-ach. *Verse.* Ma theid mi gu fèill, gu
fèis, no bann-ais Bidh ir-e làn eud, 's i-
fein aig bail-e; 'S ma bheir mi le sug-radh
sùil-cail-eig, Gur diumb fal-achd-si d'dhomh-sa, O

Ma ni mis' tigh-òsda stòp a cheannach,
Mo suidhe air bòrd 's gun òl mi dràma,
Theid faileadh 'na sròin 's a dòrn an tarruinn,
'S bithith muinntir a bhaile ri mòd oirrn.

O-hì-o-hà, etc.

O-hì-o-hà, how hard is the *cailleach!*
O-hì-o-hà, how cold is the *cailleach!*
Ho-rè-ho-rà, she's spiteful, the *cailleach!*
Myself was the foolish young booby.

If I'll go to a fair or a feast or a wedding,
She's jealous the while, and herself at the townland;
If ever I'll cast a sweet eye on a lass,
What a grudge she'll be taking against me!

O-hì-o-hà, etc.

If myself's at the bothy nor buying a mutchkin,
At table am sitting and never a dram,
She'll come sniffing her nose and shaking her fist;
The folk will be crowding about us.

O-hì-o-hà, etc.

Sitting all day in the warmest corner, or out-by at the house-end in the sun, the old folks' thoughts so shape themselves in old-word (*seann-focal*) and dark-word (*dubh-focal*) that, when they speak them out, their very own will ask of one another, What do they *mean?* So devout as they are too. . . . Did you hear how old Fionnaghal in Benbecula lost her teeth? Someone told her, if she would take (off) the heads of nine nines of beetles with them, she would see God.

"And did you do it?" Father Allan asked her.

"I did. But I saw nothing. . . . There was another woman trying it, but she died."

"That was an awful thing for you to be doing!"

"It was that. . . . But it was worth while—it was worth while!" [1]

You wouldn't take them for the jokers that they are. "One had the toothache one time, when another who was dropping in said, 'Och,—I'm so sorry! I have a charm against it.' So she took her up to the hill-fold and told her to call out at each

[1] Under my notes of this I find in Father Allan's hand, "Just to try it."

of the four corners, *'Tha mise so, 's an deideadh orm*—Here's myself, and toothache on me!' "

"The poor old woman had her face done up, and lisped anyway, but she went all round the fold, and called out as loudly as she could, "*Tha mise so, 's an deideadh orm!*' "

"Then the other one shouted out, *'Tha mise so, 's cha misde leum sin*—Here's myself, and none the worse!' and trotted away as fast as she was able."

And, "One night at *céilidh*, an old man was saying it was the night the *Sithean* (Fairy Mound) would be open. . . . Then he'd be saying, every now and then, He must be going on. Well he knew every boy's eye was on him! . . . So at last he started. It was a wild night, and he went a long road,—and all to fool the boys who were following him. . . . And he an old man turned of eighty!"

"I don't like this making fun of old women," I objected, after taking down *Mo Ghràin a' Chailleach* and another of the same stripe.

"Why, they like it *themselves!*" said Father Allan.

VII

It's curious to mark the Irish traits here—with a difference. Islesmen and Highlanders don't like the Irish, Irish though they be in origin themselves, with only twelve miles of salt water between them

in Antrim and Argyll. But the old stock, re-set in a soil more unkindly, and withal the Lochlanner grafted thereupon, would seem to have toughened in more ways than one,—nor wholly to its betterment, perhaps. "You won't hear anything said there that would hurt your feelings," says an Irishman to me of his own calf-country. . . . I'd not insure yours thus in *Innse-Gaill*.

Better neighbours never were than here, nor warmer-hearted. But they've a sense of humour singularly robust; and the Gaelic, that sharpened the tongue of Rob *Donn*, and reddened the cheek of many a Highland gentleman—and Highland lady too—in the days when the *Cliar-Sheannachaidh* were sorning on the West,—the Gaelic, abounding as it does in paronyms,[1] assuredly can serve them. . . . I'll show you a man in this very room can drive you out a rat withal (the grey-eyed one has seen him do it); will sit him down before the hole and there hold forth so eloquently on the occupant and his ancestors that at length and at last Mr. Rat can be putting up with it no longer. . . .

I won't say there's no such thing among two-legged beings as to take offence. . . . "Don't let that lie around—someone might see it," Father Allan warned me once, when showing me a skit of his own

[1] For example (from Macleod and Dewar's Dictionary): "*Coilleag;* A cockle; a smart stroke; a potato sprout; a rural song; a loud and cheerful note." Not to mention *Coilleag a' Phrionnsa*—Prince Charlie's Bay.

on—but there!—that's telling. . . . However, it's give-and-take amongst them, in the main.

"Is Aonghas here?" will ask a woman, coming into a neighbour's to look for her son,—a grown man, but a wee one.

"He's not *here*, whatever," will answer the man-of-the-house, peering into the depths of his own sea-boot that stands by.

She'll take it in good part. Indeed, word-handiness is held so high by Islesmen that they'll stand a little pertness with it, even from the children. There was a little chap that heard his father ask his mother, "What mark will we put on the sheep?"

"A gill on one ear and a half-mutchkin on the other," calls out the *beadagan*,[1] whose father is fond of a dram.

The father takes up a stout stick, and the lad takes his two soles out of it. But the father'll tell it on himself.

"God gives us this, because we have so little," said the grey-eyed girl, one time that I remarked upon their ready wit and cheerful spirits. We stood at the window of my room just then, and she looking outwards and downwards saw passing a youth she was forever teasing. . . . A meaning gesture,—and he makes off down the path, hands shaking high above his head, crying out lamentably, "O *Dhia, Dhia!*" [2]

[1] Brat.

[2] "Yeè-a, yeè-a" (God, God)!

VIII

With singing, with chaffing, with burning of peats and with telling of tales old and new, so go the nights in Father Allan's Island; and so the Isles over amongst Catholics. Free-Kirkers have the name of being more strait-laced; though when I was amongst them in Skye, at two weddings, I found them all merry enough, once the minister away. . . . "They're waiting for me to go before the fun begins," himself said in my ear at table; a genial man withal and a well-liked.

After supper (which I can't somehow recall except as mutton-broth and whisky—but I know there was good and plenty more to it) we sat down in the byre on long forms from the school-house, knee to knee, and sang till broad daylight. Three songs were going there at once, everyone in the room lifting under the one or the other, and whisky going too! They're sober enough, most whiles, but save up for a wedding.

Then each pays so much, and carries round the bottle and the glass—I made one round with them myself. I don't know how many trips these took that night, nor yet how many times I *tasted* (for you can't refuse). It's not a high-proof whisky, anyhow. I've no head at all myself, and yet I didn't feel it. But towards daylight I remember one young woman leading out her man, a strapping fellow,

tall and bearded, but meek as a lamb, and he falling all over us as they squeezed by. But all that she said was, and she smiling about her, "I think it's time we were going!"

When Father Allan wedded any of his own people, the first round of whisky he served with his own hand at the chapel-house, where also the first reel would be danced. And when thereafter they set forth for the bride's house, the piper playing on before, Father Allan went with them, to make the night of it, and to see that the bottle made only so many rounds (*deasal*) and no more. And if by any chance the dancing flagged, I have heard say that Father Allan's "*Suas e!*" [1] was louder than any. No quarrel had he with the piper nor with the *seannachaidh*, nor even with whisky in moderation. "*We know how necessary it is for our poor people to be happy*," I have heard him say.

How can that be?

Well,—without the black house may be coarse weather, and within, little bread and many round it. But if the nameless namer of the isle, whose own name is forgot, could but give a look-in at a proper *céilidh*, even now he should not find the name outworn. For here in his Island of Youth, in the hearts of young and old, youth still abides. God gives it them indeed, because they have so little.

[1] Swash-ay! Up with it!

IX

It's a quaint thought at *céilidh*, that here we were in those very "Yllis, quha, being void of the knawledge and feir of God, and the reverence and obedience aucht his Majestie, delytis in na thing ellis bot blude, murther, and all kynd of barbarous and bestlie cruelties, to the offens and displesour of God, and the sclander and reproche of this haill natioun;" and that the forbears of this very folk we're rubbing elbows with stand in State Papers of his Majestie aforesaid as "barbarous canniballis, quha nevir in ony aige wer civill, bot hes bein the schoolemaisteris and fosteraris of all barbaritie, savaignes, and crueltye."

Are we then to conclude that Islesmen nowadays are as "vertew, lerning, and the Inglis tung" have made them?

Well,—as for "vertew;" they had their priests then, as they have them now, and no thanks to His Majestie James Sixth for that. And as for "lerning"—that's a large word, surely, for what they can get at the school-house in the *Baile*,—nor has that been there long. As for the "Inglis tung"—most of the men have more or less of it, to be sure. Some of them have seen the world before the mast, or what a sailor glimpsés of it in the ports. . . . *New York himself is a bonnie place*, one says. But the old people have not English wherewithal to pass

the time of day. Nor are they so well off in body or estate as under the old order. While as for the amenities: whereas their elders were free of the chief's house and met chief and tacksman in their own as man to man, they are now, but for the priest and teacher (and the teacher in Eriskay when I was had no Gaelic), thrown back wholly on themselves.

It's not easy seeing whom they've to thank, then, that they are better than their fathers,—if indeed as to this we're to take the word of one who never risked his skin amongst them, or of such as visited them but to bring the torch and sword. Better witness than theirs is, I think, between the boards of *Carmina Gadelica*, concerning which a Sasunnach has said:

"In these two volumes, a treasury of delight to the Gael, have been set down good store of prayer, invocation, and charm, and what-not, in a Gaelic that in its wording shows a continuity from very early times. Drawing nothing from books, but only from the lips of men, dealing in verse alone, these volumes, with their fascinating introduction and notes, reveal nothing less than a whole lost world of culture; the deepest spiritual life of a race. Obscure, uncultivated and isolated as these people were, they developed among themselves a spiritual culture brilliant, imaginative, full of grace and dig-

nity, such as it would be difficult to parallel among the records of any other primitive race." [1]

Yes: and were the writer of these words to see for himself what James Sixth never saw—these folk on their own soil; were he to sit with them at *céilidh* in their own poor houses, he would find that world not even yet a lost one; that spiritual life still lived on the True Edge of the Great World.

X

Now there are those that wish the Islesfolk well, and, deeming them to "suffer from a too limited experience of the world," [2] urge emigration for and on them.

Ourselves who in one way or another suffer from experience too extended might be asking, What have they thereby to gain?

Well,—if their flitting were to be no further than from Eriskay across the Kyles, to the lands that kept their forbears well enough in meal and milk, surely one could wish them nothing better. But if the water were the ocean, or the Minch, one might be asking rather, What do they stand to lose?

Their speech, at all events, their sweet high-sounding speech, that was in the mouths of kings and bards in *Albainn* before the seeds of English

[1] T. W. Rolleston, in the London *Chronicle*.
[2] Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Chairman of Congested Districts Board, 1900. The above is from a letter to Major Matheson of the Lews, dated 1902.

speech were sowed in English soil: the speech that looks so rough in print, yet sounds so softly:

Its large unhurried gait bespeaking it the utterance of thoughtful men, yet having its short-cuts and its sword-thrusts too:

The speech wherein, as in the hollow of a shell, the child of the black house may hear the murmur of a far-off mighty past.

"Well,—but the English is a good tongue, too," you'll say. "Love is love in any language," says an Englishman to me, we being on the subject (of the language); "and I doubt if it can be better said than in the English."

True enough, for an Englishman. But is he to be doing the Gael's love-making for him? It's hardly a question of better or worse: the question, I take it, is of what's one's own. . . . *Ye can say it so much stronger in the Gaelic.* . . . Who, having talked with a Highlander, but hears this, first or last? For how is he, with his poor chance of schooling, to get good change of English for his Gaelic? Good-bye, then, to his poet-thoughts for good and aye, once he's out in the Great World. If he shall think them still, who'll be the wiser?

Nor in his after-life shall schooling in the Gaelic make him up his disinherison. *Gadhlig gu leoir aig a' Mhaghastair Ailein*—Plenty Gaelic at Father Allan, I have heard his people say. But he—best scholar in the Isles, poet, preacher, jester too upon

occasion—himself used to declare, "I haven't the speech of these old people." And why not? Because his parents, Highlanders of long descent in Far Lochaber though they were, being inn-keepers had the English, and practised it about the house while he was first getting the use of his own tongue. So that the idiom the child of the black house never wastes time learning, that the old people *salt every sentence with* (as he would say), he felt he had never fully mastered.

"Any one of them could put better words into it than these," he protested when I praised the live phrasing of his little play. And one night later, when a man, considering his part, made some emendation, he turned to me with a "What did I tell you?" . . . "I never write a thing that pleases me but I find it better said already in some song," he said again.

Well, then: I cannot count the loss of native utterance a light one. But grant it so: grant it even well lost for the sake of better fortunes.

And is the Islesman sure of these, then?

Unskilled as he is, his Island virtues such as mainly tell against him in the world, he's like to be changing his black house for nothing better than a "back-land" in a Glasgow slum, or a back room in a "lung-block" in Manhattan. And there's a Baldrouboudour-bargain for you!—a fine new lamp to be getting for his old one. . . .

To be sure, the children will have better chance of schooling. But ask anyone who knows, What more than their lessons they'll be learning.

XI

And these grey-eyed girls, woman-grown,—do you like to think of them behind a counter, or before a power-machine?

They're hardly like to spoil their teeth in such employment, to be sure, as poor old Fionnaghal did, —nor like to see their God there either, if I'm to believe what I'm hearing. . . .

Domestic service, then,—that's urged as more "protected."

I wish whoever thinks so might have had my chance to judge of it one summer. I'd stayed in town to work on this same book in quiet, as I hoped; my room being at the back, and giving on the hollow of a "high-class" block, where most of the houses were closed for the hot weather. But in some three or four the maids were left as care-takers. So, whether I would or no, I must overlook most of their on-goings, day and night. And a pity of them though it was, poor things! who themselves wanted care-taking surely more than any four walls in the town, yet I doubt they'll be sorrier for themselves some day than anyone will be for them.

Yet such is but one of their chances. Now that "the family's" in town again, how much the more are they protected? What more can any mistress do for maids in town or country than to "hope they won't be foolish," and to warn them—at risk to herself of a "warning"? They'll not attend her—class-hostility discounts whatever she may say. They're counselled much more to their minds by company they keep, and this she can't control. It's a show, the respect they seem to pay her: a sham, the protection she's supposed to give them. And what is she to do about it?

"I'll take home two or three of these," she'd say if she were here to-night, and think so her troubles were over.

They're friendly and gentle, they're modest and truthful; their fathers and mothers and the priest have done their duty by them, the fear of the town-lands' bare boards has backed their elders' counsel. A far cry from these as they are, to what she's left behind; putting all they can earn on their backs, pounding round on their silly high heels ("and it's as much as their stockin's'll stay in the tops of their shoes," says one of the old sort); shirking all that they can, doing Heaven knows what or what-not once her back is turned. . . .

Bare-footed on the bog they came from, they'll have been nowise other than these grey-eyed ones here. And sooner than to be putting these in those

others' places, I don't mind saying I'd see them in their coffins on the stakes.

XII

But a man has a better chance in the Great World, you'll say. And since the Islesman's such a man of *tonuisg*, why shouldn't he be getting on?

Belike he shall. But not till he's unlearned the code men live by in the Isles. For how shall he love his neighbour as himself, and yet be studying to over-reach him? *Worldly-mindedness*, of all things most abhorred amongst the townlands, must serve who would deal with the World and the Flesh and *The One-we-won't-mention*, if he'd hope to hold his own. Success will have its cess: I doubt he'll find himself worse cumbered in the end, if he attain it, than by want of tackle.

And what if at the tying of the thumbs all this comes out? Suppose, when he's made his last ferry, it's shown him he's gifted his own with the one hand to rob them with the other? How in that day shall he warn them? how counsel them or give them comfort? Out-by on the Edge of the World there needs no troke with Pipers nor Palladinos. But I'd pity any poor soul of an Islesman that would be coming back here in the town. For it's like he'd find amongst his own no eye to see him and no ear to hear him.

"When I first saw the Highlands, I felt I had come home," I once heard say the aged Bishop Cameron of Antigonish in Nova Scotia, whose grandfather came from Locheil.

I could have told him of another, her forbears longer in the New World than were his, who came to the land of her race *with her head full of school and her feet full of dancing*, to find herself as one who seeks with neither key nor clue where buried treasure lies:

To feel, on that soil where her elders lie buried, the wraiths of old race-memories rise within her:

To glimpse, in the workings of wind and tide, of rain and sunshine, ends higher than the quickening of seeds or the filling of sails:

To see as it were played before her some Morality, whereby in some sort she might be the wiser, if only she might understand:

To eye at last the earth in its unearthliness as one who searches the still visage of the dead, whose strange smile hints a secret not to be surprised.

How should such an one not say, My forbears had *The Knowledge of the Two Worlds.* And how am I robbed of my birthright!

When I hear talk of sending these away, then, "for their own good," I am minded of that old Highland story of the *Feinne* asleep in their cave, crying out on the one that half-waked them, "*Is miosa dh'fhag*

no mar fhuair—Worse have you left us than you found us!"

XIII

The last *Oidhche mhath* has been said, and it's daylight already, in a summer month. In winter, if it's clear, the Northern Lights are leaping to the lift. But none shall go home *with themselves* before cock-crow, men nor women, if there's company to be had. And the child that's to carry a sieve to her home will take cold iron in the other hand, for fear of Them that most delight to boat the air in such a craft, and might, but for the talisman, swoop down and carry off the child and all,—unless she were fed on the milk of a cow that had browsed on *meangan.*

And now the good-wife smoors the fire.

I wish I had seen this for myself: I might have, and welcome, but somehow never thought on it. So let Carmichael [1] tell it:

"The embers are evenly spread on the hearth . . . and formed into a circle. The circle is then divided into three, a small boss being left in the middle. A peat is laid between each section, each peat touching the boss, which forms a common centre. The first peat is laid down in name of the God of Life, the second in name of the God of Peace, the third in name of the God of Grace. The circle is then

[1] *Carmina Gadelicà,* note.

covered over with ashes sufficient to subdue but not extinguish the fire, in name of the Three of Light. The heap, slightly raised in the centre, is called *Tulla nan Trì*—The Hearth of the Three. When the smooring is completed, the woman closes her eyes, stretches her hand, and softly intones:

"I will build the hearth
As Mary would build it;
The surrounding of Bride and Mary
Guarding the house, guarding the floor,
Guarding the people all."

"Who are they on the lawn without?
Michael the sun-radiant of my trust.
Who are they on the middle of the floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
Who are they by the front of my bed?
Sun-bright Mary and her Son."

"The mouth of God ordained,
The angel of the Lord proclaimed
An angel white to keep the hearth,
Till white day shall come to the embers."

And so—the black house black at last indeed—to bed and to sleep sweetly.

XIV

I was speaking one time with a doctor in a Lowlands town (a man well up in years and well-to-do), and chanced to mention *céilidh*. He had a Highland name and came from a black house; but this last I had not guessed because his tongue had lost the

Highland turn to it.' Well!—I chanced to mention *céilidh*, but for carelessness I made the *éi* something short. And so at first he did not understand. But all at once it was, "Och,—*céilidh!*" And I saw his cheek red, and his look far-away,—yes, and the tear in his eye and he bearded.

"We'd have tatties an' herrin' afterwards," he went on to say, "and maybe a bit of a fight on the way home." Neither of which features I observed in Eriskay.

FATHER ALLAN'S OWN FIRE-END

WHENEVER I stood up at ten or thereby of an evening, it was always, "Och,—don't go *yet!* You haven't said half what you wanted to."

Yet he was ready enough with his own *Oidhche mhath*, whether at *céilidh* or at The Other House, where a painter he knew, and other two, were stopping for a time. Two or three calls there, and as many *céilidhs* elsewhere made up the sum of our outgoings together by night.

Célidh has had its own tale to itself. Of the calls I remember best our home-coming after one a trifle dull. "Give me your hand," said Father Allan, as the door shut to behind us, and we stepped forth into the gusty moonless night, its dimness all the deeper for the pale auroral flickering overhead, where the stars stood too high and too small to be lighting us. "Give me your hand!" I thought he meant to lead me by the path, and the next that I knew we were cutting straight across the pasture,—like to break our necks, all ups and downs and what-not as it is,—laughing and shouting like school-boys let out. . . . "I suppose you know every rock?" I

gasped, doing my best, and he pulling me along.

"Och,—I'll show you a rock when we strike it!"

Home again, however late, the peats must be stirred, and the bottle of Spanish wine brought out from the press by the chimney-piece, or maybe a mild grog mixed when we were weary, so that he might finish out the day to his own liking, at his own fire-end.

When we settled down directly after supper, I would throw a cushion on the floor, one side the grate. So seated, my back to the box that held the peats,—the good clean firing you may lift with your bare fingers, and they none the worse,—so seated, I say, not only could I mend the fire when that was wanting, but so—and only so—could I get Father Allan into the one arm-chair and keep him there.

With his feet in another, a pipe in his mouth, a good fire and a listener before him, truly here was a man that needed no drawing-out. Yet he himself could listen—none better, and a quicker at the uptake never was. Say what you would, you'd get no blank looks from the priest of Eriskay. Whitman—Whittier — Longfellow — most of our American classics he'd dipped into first or last: never tired to hear about "the States." . . . "I'm *so* interested in those 'po' whites!' " I remember his saying after I'd been mentioning our Southern mountaineers. And once when after writing letters for a while as he sat by, I read aloud, to break a silence rather long:

"Mrs. —— ——
Cleveland,"

"Ohio?"—he capped it with a little smile. . . . Match me that if you can in *The Adjoining Kingdom!*

"A deep scholar" some have called him since he's gone. He himself used to say, He never broke his head studying. The truth lay between the two, I take it, for he seemed to know more or less of most things you could mention; had read a deal, not only in the English and the Gaelic, Scots and Irish, but in Latin, Spanish, and—I think—French: he had a grammar of the Basque tongue too. And most assuredly he had remembered well. But that only served to make him all the more a Gael, who had rather *Mac Mhaghastair Alasdair* and Sinclair's *Òrainaiche* than all the English poets put together, and the Neo-Celts forbye. I never heard him praise but two of these latter: Neil Munro,—"*'The Lost Pibroch's'* the real thing!" he declared,—and Padraic Colum, whose play, *The Land*, he himself put in my hands and bade me read. All I could get out of him anent the others was, "Yes,—that's very pretty. But it doesn't appeal to me."

His was the mind of the earlier Celt—the Celt of the cycles and *sgeulan*, robust and positive, desirous and direct. With that world-weariness of nowadays, that faintness of the will that wears with such an air the Celtic weed, he was in no sort of sympathy.

Meeting with it at the outset in Yeats' *Wind among the Reeds*, he had not gone far enough further, I think, to find anything else there,—certainly not in his plays. I thought this a pity, and planned to send him *Countess Cathleen*, making sure that it would fare otherwise with him than had *Phàrais*, sent by another hand not long before. "Fiona Macleod's just another Macpherson's *Ossian*," he declared. "Why,—she's got all her Gaelic—where it isn't wrong—out of Mrs. Mary Mackellar's *Guide to the Highlands*.[1] . . . And I'm sure no Highland woman would ever have written *that* horrible thing!" —the *Rune of the Sorrows of Woman*.

And how was he—a man and a priest—to know how a woman takes herself?

Well,—as between himself and any *Sasunnach*, Father Allan was, I think, by way of seeing the further. First and last, a priest of the Isles comes pretty far ben into his people's lives. Poverty endured in common is a bond unequalled; sickness and bereavement both bring in the priest; and in the two small rooms of a black house the facts of life are, for the most part, plain enough to see. Speech, too, is plain amongst plain people—as, indeed, was Father Allan's own; nor was he afraid to think and speak on matters that a priest has nought to do with.

[1] The secret was not out then. As for the Gaelic, what of a title —*Phàrais*—in the genitive? While neither Scot nor Irish would address a girl named Màiri as *"a' Mhoire,"*—a form held sacred to the Blessed Virgin by Gaels everywhere.

Did he not give me himself, out of his own note-book, the whole of *'S e mo Ghaoil a' Mhàiri Lurach* —It's Comely Mary That's My Love—merely saying of one verse, "You won't want to sing *that*. It's pretty pastoral, you know." So again, when a woman paused between the verses she was singing me to ask him, looking doubtful, "Shall I give her *that?*" he nodded coolly, and proceeded to set down for me a quatrain which, for frankness anent certain of a woman's "sorrows," it would be hard to beat.

No offence, then, had the *Rune* for him as to its matter—it was only that *Highland women don't look at things that way*. . . . "No one understands us," he would say, with indeed more than one grudge in mind, past and present, against the *Sasunnach*,—but chiefly that last, that his stout-hearted Islandry should stand accused of gloom—the Celtic Gloom.

To clear them of this—to make them known not as light-minded, yet cheery at heart and in their conversation too, no less than kindly and devout; to show forth their lot in life as not unlike to one of their own houses, which without are nowise lightsome to look upon, yet better within than a stranger and *Sasunnach* might think,—such was Father Allan's chief concern, I think, throughout the whole of our foregathering. Very much as he would fill me out a glassful of his Spanish wine, would he bring forth the tale of some old man or woman, their making and taking of jokes; of Hamish the herd-boy,

always hungry, warming himself now and then in Father Allan's kitchen; who when the grey-eyed girl would give him a biscuit, ran home to give it to "the others," with never a bite out for himself. . . . A child that Father Allan loved to think upon. "There's nothing he's so fond of as potatoes," he said once.

"What does he get mostly?"

"Och,—just potatoes! But Providence has made them delicious to him—if only he could get enough of them." For Hamish's father is a landless cottar, and there are eleven of "the others."

And again: of the man who when he saw a white pigeon on the roof, told the children not to harm it. "For I thought it might be the soul of my dead child come home to visit me." Of the poor agonising *cailleach*, dying of a cancer at *Ros-an-Fhìos*, gasping out to him between her spasms, "Isn't it a shame I must be troubling you!" Of old Cairstinn, who minded the Putting-away of the People, hirpling up the brae whenever the chapel-bell was ringing; and old Ealasaid. . . . "Whenever I'm not saying my prayers, I'm singing. Ever since I was a child I was not without the *torraman* (humming) of a song in my mouth. I had a sore finger once,—see? . . . and I made a song on *that*." I take these almost at random from my notes. His own, ten stout booksful, had gone to Edinburgh just before I came, and for my sake he regretted

them sorely (though very proud to find them "worth anything at all"), but unceasingly he ransacked his brains for me, the lucky woman that I was. They had told me true who said there was no one like him anywhere for folklore. Nor was this for his store of it alone, but rather that—like his Gaelic—he HAD it.

When he first came to the Isles, the old priest he relieved,—who lived with him thenceforward and there died—had prophesied, "My boy, when you've ploughed what I've harrowed, you'll believe more things."

And the more as time went on with him, the more I fancy he felt leave to single out from what was bred of ignorance, what he took to be his own by way of Celtic birthright, while his *tonuisg* and his hearty sense of humour held the balance. There was a great bird that came there on a time, he said, and was thought to be the warning of great troubles: it was heard but never seen. Father Allan had administered the last rites to a man, and when he came out, the bird cried nearby . . . " 'It's easy telling Donald hasn't long to live,' said they. . . . And what could *I* say—when the man was dying? . . . A man's wife was ill, and he went away in a hollow to pray by himself, and the bird cried over his head. He came tumbling into the house, crying out, 'O my poor motherless children!'—and his wife not very ill at all. They had a great laugh at him. I was prob-

ably the only man in the island who thought it a natural bird—a stray from another place, and so it proved to be. It was heard several times in the same place, and I was suggesting that they get a gun and shoot it. I suppose they thought I was impious!"

"Never call a man a fool because he believes what isn't likely," Father Campbell had admonished him. But likely or not, so long as a notion were not to the good, he scrupled not to discredit it; as for instance that old cruel Highland saying that "tears scald the dead in their shrouds." "Isn't it a *wicked* thing for me to be doing this?" he minded one poor mourner saying, struggling with his grief. And why then had God given tears to men? Father Allan asked him, bidding him weep on.

But again, one day as we were passing through the harbour, he asked me, Did I see that little black fellow over there? . . . It was the colour of the child's hair that he meant: in Highland districts generally, where so many are of the one surname, folk are tagged *Dubh*—black, *Bàn*—fair, *Ruaidh*—red, and so on. . . . The child had strayed down on the rocks, he went on, when he was four years old, and his mother, missing him, went crying and wringing her hands as she called him, for the rocks were slippery with the sea-weed, and the tide was coming in. "But here he was coming up, and saying in his baby-talk. There were two nice ghosts (*dà laghaich bochdan*) down there, all in white, and

one was the nicest, for it said to him, *Run away up to the house, his mother was looking for him. . . .* Now, no one wears white in Eriskay, and there was no one on the shore anyhow."

"And what do you think it was?"

"It was his guardian angel," said Father Allan reverently. "You cannot get nearer Heaven than this."

Nearer the Otherworld, surely, one might hardly hope to feel one's self on earth; nor, for this, needs not to abide there for even so long as from a Lady-Day to near St. Michael's. Stepping out the back door at an hour of dusk and lateness to fill my jug at the rain-barrel, how hopefully, how fearfully withal would I peer round me in the dim boreal half-light! No matter how often, it never was the less of an adventure to pass from firelight and lamplight, and Father Allan in his slippers, into a world built as it were from neither earth nor air; a world for the bodiless to stray in, neither dark nor daylit, whereon my coming cast no shade; and high to northwards the Host at their ceaseless sword-play in the lift, their soundless and endless leaping on Uist hills. Nothing fails after nightfall in Father Allan's Island, but one's eyes, for *seeing*.

Father Allan himself had *seen* but once, he said, and that nothing more than the corpse-candle (a sight nowise out-of-the-way), and in another island. Looking down from a hill-side by night, he saw it

move across the plain, then down a glen, to a house where he knew a man was dying: walking homewards, met a messenger to say, The man was dead. But at Dalibrog, on a night before one of his young men was drowned, he lay awake a long time, hearing outside a low murmuring as of a multitude. Father Chisholm, a priest (and seer as well) from another parish, was in another bed in the same room and asleep, or so Father Allan thought. But presently he spoke out, saying, "Do you hear anything?"

"It might be the wind."

"You know it is *not* the wind," rejoined the other. They got up and looked out at the window, which gave on the gravelled doorland of the chapel, but saw nothing.

Next day Father Allan was in the same room while they were carrying the drowned man into the chapel; and when he heard them underneath the window, speaking low amongst themselves, he knew that sound for what he heard the night before.

My notes of this fireside talk were rough enough. Never one could say more to the minute than he, nor did he like stopping for me to catch up. Moreover, as the *seannachaidh* says, *It is the one thing to have a tale, and the other to put it into its joints.*

My sorrow! how poor it is now on the paper, what once I heard so richly said; so clear and so rapid, so elegant even, was the turn of Father Allan's tongue. Eyes sparkling—lips smiling—his brows in a com-

motion—his long fingers hovering about the one and the other after a curious way he had,—now touching, now tapping them lightly; sometimes inclining his head a little towards me as he spoke, looking upwards and sidewise at me, and smiling into my eyes with a little shade of wistfulness; his strangely young-old face would then be at its youngest and its most engaging. I grudged to look away.

Scratching down, then, a word or a phrase here and there to remind me, I would write out his talk by candle-light up-stairs while he said his office down below; sometimes would be at it for long after I was hearing his light footing past my door, the soft fall of his latch at the end of the passage.

Come to think on it, his step was never anything but light, "long" man though he was, nor his movements other than sure. He never fumbled,—I've heard him speak scornfully of "fingerless people,"—and an ease as of the Great World never failed this man, so little worldly, who in truth had the world so little to thank for anything. What would *he* be doing in a drawing-room?—he had been in one but two or three times in his life, he would say, when I hinted, Why not take a trip across the water, and make new friends in the New World?

Not but that the notion pleased him. He had the Celtic pride in making a good figure, and used to recall with satisfaction his successes in the plays they had given now and then at the Scots College. . . .

"And I'd like it now!" . . . Nor was his pride of that uneasy sort that made it so hard for him to find amongst his Islesmen two men who would undertake the title-rôles of his own folk-play, built on a folk-tale of two men who venture into a *Sìthean* (Fairy Mound). There are several of these in Uist: no one has been known of late to go into them, but smoke has been seen coming from them, I find in my notes. The first man hints modestly a way to better their Mouth-tune, and has his hump taken off him for reward: the second "spoils the tune," and finds himself outside the mound at cock-crow, with his own hump on him and the other's too. He was planning, when I came away, to have this done at the school-house. "And I'd do one of the *Bodachan* myself, if I wasn't a cleric!"

For a time I used to be asking him, Didn't he want to keep this or that bittie for himself?

"Och, no! What does it matter, so long as the things get known?"

To be at such trouble, all for others' credit, seemed to me a pity. He shook his head. "I haven't any *personal* ambition."

But mightn't he be making better use of his own findings than another could?

This seemed to strike him, for indeed he had been little pleased with the working-up one pair of hands, at least, had given them. But, "I don't like writing a thing *twice*," he confessed.

And God knows that—writing or no writing—Father Allan had done his day's darg.

What this had been he had no little relish in relating. And I, as I listened, would be thinking, This ought to be made known, or, That should not be forgotten. But how to be putting your friend and your host, without his leave, into a book? I would not be so *English* as that. And here, as at parting with the *cailleach* in the glen, I showed my want of *tonuisg:* too late, when the time seemed in some sort gone by, I learned that what I would I might have written down, and welcome. Well, then, thought I, I shall be coming back. . . .

"Write out what you can remember," counselled one when he was gone. . . . And even then the mists that are more than Hebridean were thickening fast about the tale he told.

Only for what was out of common in himself, this was the common tale of priestly service in the Isles. First and last, this has called men of no common mettle, from Columcille to the priest of Eriskay himself; men ready to steer their coracles unmoved through shoals of hellish beasts, to face white martyrdom [1] and red in the old days, and fever or

[1] The Rule of St. Columba enjoins: "A mind fortified and steadfast for white martyrdom. A mind prepared for red martyrdom." Dean Reeves' notes say of these: "White martyrdom. That is, self-mortification, or ascetic practices, or bodily chastisement, as opposed to red martyrdom, where blood is shed, or life laid down for truth's sake." *The Rule of St. Columba,* transcribed by Michael O'Clery, one of the Four Masters, from earlier records; translated by Eugene Curry. Appendix to *Primate Bolton's Visi-*

famine in these; men of *tonuisg*, fond of a joke as of an adventure. . . . "You never get a stiff saint," I remember Father Allan saying.

Are they anywhere in print, I wonder, his tales of "Father Seumas (McGregor)" of Bornish?—"living like a peasant in rough clothes, trenching away in his garden, helping his people to make dykes and drains." Father Seumas, sometime Professor of Latin in the College at Lismore, had studied medicine, and wrought strange cures on Catholics and Free Kirkers too, who came to him from all parts of The Long Island.[1]

"Once it was an elder, all crippled with rheumatism. He took him into a room and locked the door. He took out his fiddle and played a lively reel. 'Dance you now!' he ordered."

" 'I never danced in my life!' said the scandalised Free Kirker."

" 'Dance you must!' roared Father Seumas, and dance he must and did until he was dropping on the floor. Then Father Seumas brought him to a warm bed all made ready for him." . . . "I sweated the Free Kirk out of him anyway!" he told Father Allan.

Again: "A woman came very dull and melancholy. He said, 'Sit by the fire in the kitchen,' and told everyone to come out. Then he left her

tations, edited by Dean Reeves. Irish Archeological Society, MDCCCL.

[1] Another by-name for the Outer Hebrides—Gaelic, *Innis Fada*.

there for an hour, very dull and moping. Suddenly he burst in, and threw first one bucket of water over her, then another."

Still again: "A man came with a terrible deep-seated abscess in his side. Father Seumas told him to go home and grind a peck of corn every day with the quern. He came home saying the priest was a fool, and he would have none of his treatment. But his friends persuaded him to try it—when the abscess burst."

Was he the priest, I wonder, whom Father Allan stopped to see on a holiday tramp he was taking—who said, when Father Allan started on again, "I'll see you a bit on your way,"—and walked eight miles with him? No weakling, anyway, was Father Seumas. "How did you sleep?" they asked him one morning at a house where, because of sickness, he had lain in an out-house on some bracken, the thatch broken over his head and the rain dropping down on him.

"Och, well enough!—only for a cow. There were some potatoes under me, and the cow kept pushing the door open all night, coming in to look for them. I had to get up every few minutes to drive her out."

When at a great age he grew feeble, a young priest whom Father Allan loved for his light heart was appointed his assistant and another's (who would have been, I think, the priest of Iochdar). His head full of songs, Father Allan M'Lean went

footing it round Bornish and Iochdar with an old fowling-piece over his shoulder, at £10 a year and his food; shooting wild-fowl for the pot in whatever house he might be bound for, always happy, always making songs, always playing tricks on Father Seumas.

"Father Allan (M'Lean) had caps to his gun. The children, who adored him, were always begging them. One day he was at a house where he and Father Seumas were well known. The children begged for caps. 'Wait until Father Seumas comes by,' he said, 'then get you on either side of the road and call out, '*Lair 'tha fodha, lig-i, lig-i!*' and you'll get caps.' "

"So they were delighted to think they would get caps so easily, and when Father Seumas came by they did as they were told."

"Father Seumas said nothing, but gave them an ugly look. He got off his horse and went towards the house. The father came out and Father Seumas laid about his ears with the whip, saying,

" 'Good-for-nothing! it is easy to see where your children got their manners!' "

" 'What have *I* done?' said the astonished man."

" 'Manner is not learned in the crow's nest,' said Father Seumas, and he laying his whip about the man's ears, and the man backing into the house. Whenever they were inside the door, there they see Father Allan M'Lean's gun on the table."

" '*Ach!*' said Father Seumas; '*B'h-urrasda gun*

robh ord-ionnsaidh eile-agaibh (It is plain what teaching has been at you)!' "

When Father Seumas and Father M'Lean too were gone, and Father John (whose other name I don't recall, but only that because of weakness in his throat he was dispensed from shaving) had come to Bornish in their room, the priests of Iochdar, Benbecula, and Barra, with Father Allan,—then at Dalibrog,—met one year there to make a retreat. A Jesuit Father had come from England to conduct it, and Father John, to do them handsomely, had killed a sheep. They ate of this the first night. But the next morning Father John came in to say, "I'm very sorry, but our provisions are gone." A dog had got in during the night and made off with the mutton. "And what will we do?"

"Och,—we'll do fine with salt herring and potatoes!" said the Highlanders.

"I know you're used to them, and I'm not troubling myself about you. But what will the Englishman do?"

"Oh,—that'll be all right," said he; and indeed he made light of it. . . . "But *how* can you drink such water?" It was alive. "Surely you'll all be poisoned!"

"Och,—it's a grand water, this!" they laughed. "Meat and drink both. It's a very nourishing water!"

These men, all college-bred,—at Rome, at Paris,

or at Valladolid,—are jolly as school-boys when they get together. . . . "I've laughed so sometimes I had to go outside and knock my head against the wall!" . . . Such meetings are not often. To cheer themselves between whiles, one of them plays on the pipes when at home of an evening. Another whistles by the hour the most intricate reels and strathspeys, with all the variations (I had the honour to give him one he did not know). Five in number when Father Allan was at Dalibrog, they now are six. Dalibrog, when I was there, had its second incumbent since Father Allan; his young friend Father Rigg, a lad from St. Sulpice, having died there after six years of it, from tending a family through the fever; and Father Allan's heart was still sore for him. . . . "I'm not very soft, but many's the time I've sat here, and the tear in my eye, only to think on poor Father Rigg."

And why do I mind all this—and more—so well, and Father Allan's own life-tale so ill?

Because of him who told it. What a man! I would be thinking. One with wit and parts to make him sightly anywhere, and a heart as warm as any man's. Whatever in life there might be for a man, here was one to prove and to enjoy it . . . yet triply vowed to forego life's fulness, and like to see life's term untimely soon. Is it a wonder that I gave the less heed to the tale he told, for the more I gave to him?

Maghastair Ailein, as his people called him—"I wouldn't know who they were talking about if they called me 'Father McDonald!' "—was the son of an inn-keeper (a calling esteemed most genteel in the Highlands) at Fort William, and had chief's blood in him, come-by in a way less looked down on when the chief had the rights-of-the-first-night of the newly married women of his clan, than now. He belonged, that is to say, to an illegitimate branch of the McDonalds of Keppoch known as the *Mic-an-Tighe*—the Sons of the House. Following back this line, one comes not only to the first Lord of the Isles, but also to his second spouse, the Lady Margaret, daughter of that Steward who was crowned as Robert II. King's blood, then, was in Father Allan's veins—though I never heard him mention it. But how pleased he was when he found a woman who could chant for us the Song of Donald *Donn*, composed on the eve of his hanging by a cattle-lifter and marauder famous in his day! "We come of the same stock," said he.

Anent his childhood in Far Lochaber, I recall his saying, He used to like going off *with himself* to "The Loch," whose name (Loch Linnhe) he never knew until he saw it later in his geography. Many the horse out at pasture there he'd have liked to be getting on, he said, but didn't dare, for fear it might turn out to be the Water-horse. "There was a story the children had of one that let them mount him.

His back would be getting longer and longer until they all were on. Then he plunged into the loch, and that was the last of them."

It was a childhood short enough, for he was only "going on" eleven when sent to Blair's College in Aberdeen, and thence, a little later, to the Scots College at Valladolid in Spain.

"I never broke my head studying!" None the less, he was ready for priesting before he was one-and-twenty. I believe that he travelled in Spain for a time and might have stayed there. But, Highland-born that he was, the arid uplands of Castile were "very unpleasing" to him. He wearied on them for the mountains and the mists, and before he was long priested took service gladly in the Isles; the work of two men this, though through no fault of "Bishop Angus," who often overtook their work when they fell ill of it, and died out-worn himself in middle-life. "I don't want my poor priests killed," he would say sadly enough. But Argyll and the Isles is not one of the wealthy dioceses, nor has every Highland priest the Gaelic that would serve him in the Isles, where so many of the people have no English; neither, as shall be seen, has every priest the pith for it. So that the stalwart youth with "plenty Gaelic at him," who "thought he could be doing anything those days," must have come as a God-send to Bishop Angus, and to Dalibrog and Eriskay as well.

This was just following the passage of the Crofters' Act, when the Isles were as yet barely out of their deepest misery. Thanks to the "very nourishing water," "the fever (typhoid epidemic)" came oftener than now, as also the influenza (of which Father Allan died himself at last). With one or the other raging either side the Kyles, where on the one shore the people are scattered over twenty miles of *machair*, and through long glens that open to the *machair* on three sides of it, and on the other in an island with "not enough level ground in it to make a cricket patch"; with a people whose ugliest word of cursing is "*Bàs gun sagairt agaibh*—Priestless death on you!" the priest has the impossible to do. But Father Allan did it, and a-foot, rejoicing in his strength. . . . "And I'd be sorry for the man that had to keep up with me!"

No meat from December to May, inclusive. . . . "But didn't you need it?"

"Och, no! The only time it seemed altogether unbecoming was one Christmas Day that I sat down to my dinner, and it was just a salt herring and potatoes. But you *do* need *some*thing, *some*times," he admitted. In times of fever, when the beds are burning in the townlands (they burn a man's bed of the dried sea-grass, when he dies, before his door within the hour), he would often so hasten from one to the other, in his dread to see the smoke before him, that twenty-four hours on a stretch would pass

before he broke his fast. Once it was thirty-six. . . . "Then they got me some eggs."

Again there would be the long waits at Kilbride. Pulling up some heather for a beach-fire, he would damp this with sea-weed, that the smoke might let the people know in Eriskay "the priest was wanting over." Tending this, fasting and shelterless, he might wait one hour or—as the South-west wind would have it—maybe ten.

This on top of a walk of eight miles. . . . "But wouldn't they give you a piece in your pocket when you set out?"

"Och,—if anyone had mentioned such a thing, I'd have told them not to bother!" He was used to fasting anyway, he added lightly. A rule that the poor Catholic of the Isles, who keeps his Lent the year round, makes cheerfully to work both ways. "They'll wait till three sometimes, when I've a good many stops to make," he said when I was making his rounds with him.

"But won't the old people be faint?"

"They're well use to fasting," he said, smiling.

"And what would you be doing with yourself down by the shore?"

"Och,—I'd be keeping up the fire, and I'd be making songs."

Wet or dry, sleeping in his clothes on a bare bench in whatever black house he found himself benighted; when he knelt at his own bed-side to say

his office, sometimes dropping off for weariness with the first words of it, and slumbering on till dawn, to waken chilled and stiff and kneeling still. . . . "But those things weren't hardships," he protested when I said the word. "They only made it more interesting. Whatever was coming up in those days, I was glad of it." And again: "Don't you know how it is when a man is out hunting? Such things are only a part of the fun."

There, so I take it, the true Celtic Spirit spoke. No Spirit of Gloom, but of the artist rather, wherein a man may be envisaging his own fortunes, good or bad, as they were the makings of a *sgeul*, and that not to be spoiled by such detail as a cold back or an empty belly to the hero. . . . "Such things are a part of the fun." Moreover, here was a man in the beginning more than common strong: blood in him of fighting-men and cattle-lifters too. No Dove of the Cell was he: whatever the Spirits of Terror in the path of him who has the Triple Vow to keep, be sure these would find *Maghastair Ailein* a man of his hands.

How then should he be holding back for fear of breaking? As well ask the like of the wave that hurls ashore. And so, after ten years of Dalibrog and Eriskay together, before he had come to the years men count their best, this man who had "thought he could do anything" was well-nigh at the end of his.

"I thought it was lack of fervour that ailed me, and did penance for it." Then all at once on a wild night, and he making his way homewards through the storm across the *machair*, his breath failed him. . . . "I thought if I could get off the sand and my feet on the hard ground I could get on. Then if I could get to a wall, I would lie down behind it. But there was no wall, so I kept on. And I don't know why I didn't die, for I didn't want to live."

After that the doctor said he must be resting for a little. "And indeed my knees were doubling under me when I tried to say Mass." But after a bit he thought that if he took a little exercise he might get stronger. So one day he set to work with a crow-bar, to clear his croft of earth-fast boulders.

Just then, by luck, came by the doctor. "Whatever are you doing there?" he shouted. "Don't you know you might be dropping dead any minute?"

"How so?"

"It's your heart that's all wrong!"

"Och,—why didn't you tell me that before?" said Father Allan calmly.

When his strength had indeed come back to him in some part, a town parish on the mainland, with better living and the company of book-learned men, was offered him. But he chose Eriskay rather, thinking soon to die there. Here, however, when I found him, he had already lived for other eleven years; neither lonely, save as a lettered man might some-

times feel himself amongst fishing-folk and crofters, nor yet uncomforted, but only as a priest must needs be anywhere. . . . " 'Who do you find to talk with?' my friends ask me; and I tell them, 'With the first old man or woman. And you'll never hear such beautiful talk as I get from them.' "

Moreover: in all that time he "never saw Eriskay looking grey but once."

A CHURCH FOR FISHERMEN

"You never get a stiff Saint." . . . No Gloom, then, Celtic or otherwise, was to be observed about the Sabbath even in Father Allan's Island. *Céilidh* came at the end of it—the same, but for dancing, as on any other night; while before vespers, if it chanced any sort of a decent weather, you saw his islandry by twos, by tens, by twenties, a-foot or sitting on the slope before the chapel; and the priest, bareheaded and in his soutane, striding round amongst them.

His hands in his pockets, he stands the centre of a knot, one day as the grey-eyed girl and I come round the corner.

The bell is still ringing-in. We wait, then, for no one will go in before him. One man seems to be asking him something, the rest to be hanging on his answer.

The bell stops, the question ends. Quick as a flash the priest replies, turns on his heel and strides in-doors, while a roar breaks out behind him.

I look at the girl. "He's very witty, you know," she says sedately.

"What were you saying?" I asked him afterwards.

"Och,—the one with the white beard that I call St. Peter was asking what would happen if they didn't dip the sheep [as ordered by the factor]; and I told them, 'You'll get dipped yourselves—and the big beards first.' "

Only but for him, the bearded and beardless alike had still been worshipping where he had found them one-and-twenty years before,—in a black house with never a fire on the floor of it, and a hole in the roof that would let out the reek of a townland.

When in 1901 he first addressed himself to raising money for the structure now on *Rudha Bàn*, it was learned that the proprietrix, being Protestant, was not to be reckoned upon. The late Marquis of Bute, however, though Eriskay was none of his, bestowed a liberal sum. Money came in even from Russia, from some titled man (who was it? I forget), who had happened to hear of the poor mission, and the priests of the Isles opened willingly their lean purses, while the fishermen themselves made a surprising contribution. "I waited until they had been having pretty good luck for a while," Father Allan told me; "then I said to them, 'Why not give one night's catch to the Church?' They laughed a little, but at last they said they would. That night they had the biggest catch of the whole year, and they gave the Church every pennyworth of it."

"They let down their nets in honour of Our Blessed Lady and St. Michael," Father McDougall writes me from Dalibrog. "I understand the whole amount contributed by them was £280." Moreover, they quarried and hauled down the stone from *Beann Sgrithean*, and the children brought up the sand from the shore in their play-time.

Seemly without, fair and orderly within, their little temple was when I saw it in a way to be, as Father Allan wished, "the most beautiful place they had ever seen." While I was with him, word came that a length of fine lace for an altar-cloth was on the way, while an altar-piece was being done by one of those painters whose talk of "colours" had so puzzled the grey-eyed girl. I never saw it otherwise than crowded; Highlanders all, of Church or Kirk, being great church-goers.

"I have to go round amongst the men every once in so often," a U. P. minister told me in Argyll; "and tell them, It's a pity they wouldn't stay at home now and then and mind the weans, and give their wives a chance of going to the Kirk." While in Uist you'll see them of a winter's morning setting forth before the daylight, with the "torch of the Hebrides" held high and turning them to goblins in their looks, lighting them over ten miles of rough going from the glens behind *Beann Mòr*. Well folk never stop at home unless for a cow to herd or a wean to tend; nor the old people either, so long as they can put one

foot before another. "I never went to a dancing so willingly as I go to Mass," I myself heard poor old Ealasaid saying in Father Allan's kitchen, and she no one knew how old—not even herself. There are benches enough, then, in an Island church for two-thirds of the parish, and you'll have sharp eyes, if you come late to Mass, to spy out a seat for yourself.

While the women were off at the fish-curing, a choir of young girls, as I have said, in the loft at the back of the chapel, made music at the Mass. The school-master gave them the pitch: for want of a tuning-fork even, poor fellow! he would be guessing at it, humming high and low, before Father Allan would be half-way through the Prayers before the Mass.

What these were like when Father Allan said them, it is easier to remember than to say. How, indeed, should anyone who heard him be forgetting? This voice has not its like in London, said I to myself in Dalibrog, new-come though I was then from hearing London's best. A voice like Columcille's for reaching to far places, ranging low and high, a voice with an edge to it, yet mellow as the chalumeau. Quite unaware of these qualities, I believe, he had yet learned the power of his own lungs by proving them against his brother-priests', one time at a retreat. Each had taken his turn at saying Mass, and through some defect in the acoustics of the build-

ing, none of them could fill it. "But when it came to me—*they heard me.*"

I can believe it. But, though he "didn't know he was doing it *that* way," it was rather in that way of his than in his gifts of voice, that was his chief distinction. It was his *own* way, too. I never heard, nor shall I hope to hear again, the like, now that I shall never again hear him.

Yet like many another thing in Highlands and Isles, it was with little sense of newness it came over me, but rather as it might have been the way of my own far-back forbears, or ever John the Arch-chanter was sent to the Adjoining Kingdom to teach the ways of Rome.

Whoso had knelt in that same isle good thirteen hundred years before, in fear of fire and sword and Lochlanners, might in those self-same accents have besought deliverance.

And yet before: whatever Powers of Earth or Air were worshipped there before the Cross, one felt the way of Father Allan might have served their priests no less well than it served him.

The lilt of a music immemorial was in it. Indeed, I think he may have learned it in the same school as they, and all have learned, unknowing, from those Arch-chanters, the earliest of any—the sea and the South-west wind; whose voices were the first to lift themselves among the Isles, whenever these first

showed themselves above the surge, who sing among the Isles the same tunes still.

Nor are they ever silent long in Father Allan's Island, where again no one speaks from the heart but he shall catch some lilt of theirs.

No music of the schools was here, then; no way of Rome nor of the East, but only the heartfelt utterance of one who "didn't know he was doing it that way" even; who did it but to make complaint and supplication for a few poor folk, sorely and long held down by fortune and the elements alike.

And why did I not try to take it down? some one asks me.

Truly, whoever could do that could be taking down the tunes the wind cried without at the window.

To tell the truth, I thought no more on recording the one than the other, so long as I had them in my ears; nor even on turning into the English—beyond the solemn "*O Iosa!*" at the start—the volleying syllables, the sighing cadences, the long wash and roll of the Gaelic.

I make no claims—not I. But one must indeed be little pious, to busy himself taking notes while Father Allan prayed.

So praying now, he kneels before the altar, and I, so listening, kneel in my place of honour at the front on my first Sunday. . . . When suddenly, from out the air on high, there steals a faint un-

earthlike tone . . . and then another . . . and another . . . like to the moaning of the wind, yet with a certain ordered dwelling, now on a higher pitch . . . now on a lower. . . . "That's never the wind!" say I to myself, and I put up my head in a hurry.

But it's nothing more mysterious than the young choir in the loft, just about to launch upon their timid "*Kyri-e-e*," and in their midst the poor schoolmaster with his head down, doing his best to hit on a good key. . . .

"And even then he doesn't seem to get it. It's always either too high or too low for them," said Father Allan. . . .

The sacristy, still open to the winds, serves only for changing the air of the chapel when that grows too heavy with the smell of peat-reek in the woolens. Between Mass and sermon Father Allan lets the door stand open,—not too long, for sake of "the long black lad" who has a cough. Robing himself before us at the Epistle side, when he kneels at the front of the altar, a slim lad with a wisp of sea-grass dangling from his dark-blue jersey kneels beside him.

Have I said that Father Allan is by a shade the tallest in his island? To see him striding round it on a week-day, I cannot but please myself with fancying him in some such manly dress as, say, the hunting-pink, or the casque and cuirass of the Life Guards, or—better yet—the kilt, and the bon-

net and feather no head in all the Highlands would have worn more gallantly. But his stateliness and his somewhat stern favour serve him no less well as now, when his look and his bearing are alike set in another key. Aloof, remote all through the Mass, his eyes closed whenever he turns towards us, when he faces us for the Gaelic sermon it is as though he had come back from far away.

Clasping and unclasping his long fingers, considering first the one palm, then the other, he seems to search them for his text. Considering us now squarely, he says the first words slowly . . . but soon he is off. . . . "He is catching up with the surge, and the surge couldn't catch up with him,—not the mother of the spindrift herself!"

Graceless enough is my appreciation. . . . But then, I was never a sermon-taster: my ear, too, is weary with tracing, the week through, the links of Island airs that never take the turn one looks for. To sheer enjoyment of the ear and eye—for he moves as to music—I give myself over: how much of a preacher he was I leave for himself in some sort to be saying.

"For the first few Sundays after I came to Dalibrog I went along quietly enough," he tells me. "Then all at once I put a great smoke out of myself in the pulpit; and when the people were going home they were saying to each other, 'There's something *in* the long fair man!' "

COW OF CURSES

"Bò nam mollach air an-t-sliabh,
Bò nam beannachd anns a' chliabh;
Cow of curses on the hill,
Cow of blessings in the creel."

I

THERE's a dark word for you!

But supposing one reckoned his wealth by his cattle, as men used. Well, then: wouldn't a cow on the hill-grazings mean prosperity to him? While a cow that would die would be cut up and brought down by the creel-load; and so an end to it and to prosperity as well. But in prosperity might be a curse, as in the want of it a blessing.

It's a word not so dark after all, and a very comfortable one withal to such as may be well-to-do, whereby in some sort to hold themselves discharged from alms-giving.

Comfortable too—for want of other comforts—is it to the people on the *machair* of Uist, whereabout they tell this tale:

"Our Blessed Lady and the Holy Child were walking one day through a townland. They went into a well-looking house and sat down at the back of the

door; but there was neither bite nor sup offered them, nor were they asked to sit near the fire. So they went on through the townland.

"There was a poor woman standing at the door of her hut. . . . 'Come in, come in,—for goodness' sake come in!' she cried; 'you must be tired!'

"She put them down by the fire and said to her boys (there was a crowd of them), 'Get away with you to the hill as fast as you can, and bring in the cow!' She milked it and gave them drink. It was all she had.

"When they went away, Our Lady said, 'And what will you do for her?'

"Our Lord said:

> 'Cow of curses on the hill,
> Cow of blessings in the creel.' "

" 'Wouldn't it be hard for her to lose all she has?' said Our Lady (for well she knew He meant to kill the cow).

" 'She will be all the richer for that, for then she will have God alone,' was the answer of the Holy Child."

God alone!

They know, or near, what *that* is, on the Edge of the World in the winter. And their priests who summer and winter it there with their poor people, and hunger with them, too, doubtless fail not, as in duty bound, to preach its blessedness. But I doubt

if they press that quite so far as does the tale—so did not, at least, the priest of Eriskay.

Whatever would bring a cow to the byre and more grass to its keep, more milk to the children, more peats to the fire, more bannocks to everyone, and *the taste of summer* (butter) on them now and then,—these and such-like matters he helped forward all he could; not concerned—man of *tonuisg* that he was—lest they should prove a Cow of Curses.

But how might it be with himself—were he content or no? No woman could but wonder. So, having the chance one fine day, I was so *English* as to ask him. And he took no offence; for, indeed, he had just then been telling me of a time before his priesting when his heart had so misgiven him as to his own unworthiness that at last he must confess it.

"Would you wish to be anything but a priest?" asked his director.

"Not I!" said the lad.

"Then a priest you should be," declared the old man. . . . "And I'd have broken my heart if he'd said anything else," added Father Allan.

"Were you ever sorry since?"

"Never once!"

II

Sundown and a windless calm, and we out on *Rudha Bàn* getting our mouthful.

Far out-by on the reefs to West, grey-dark and small against the dazzle, foams up by times and falls again some wave of the Atlantic, come all the way from Labrador to leap and to fling on these outledges of the world. The sun, westering low, flings his long red *breacan* straight out towards us on the water, where it lies well-nigh without a wrinkle or a fold. Small and shorn of his rays as he sinks, he lowes red in the haze as a peat-coal.

The rocks at our feet change all at once from grey to violet, the grass-blades to tiny flames of green. The blaze on the water would blind you.

To save our eyes, we look Northwards, where Uist, fading like a cloud, hangs in the Kyles as in a nether sky. All untroubled they lie: far out-by to East the sea and sky are met with never a seam.

"Uist is like a new-made world!" half-whispers Father Allan.

III

Now here are a hundred and fifty of islands, not counting the reefs and the skerries, and folk in maybe forty. But—would you believe it?—they look any day for another.

"What news?" asked a man of the priest, one day on the *machair* of Uist.

Just for a joke he answered, "Och, nothing much! —only there's an island come up off Barra, and it full of red-headed people."

"Didn't I always *say* ROCCABARRA would be coming up at last!" cried the man.

And will ROCCABARRA be as she were new-made in that day, I wonder?—or is she old already on the floor of the deep sea as *Innse-Gaill* itself?

What time fire and sword worked men's will overhead, and the stuff of the sagas and *sgeulan* (and of Blue Books, too) was in the making, was she lying there below it all, unmindful—beyond storm's breath or warfare's rumour—safe-sunk in her still depths whereover the sailing and oaring were as clouds that hurry in the lift?

The shaky coracles of bull's-hide stretched on sticks, that carried the Cross to the Islesmen; the long-ships hung round with the shields of Lochlanners, beating the waves with half-a-hundred oars; the Lords of the Isles in their lymphads; the brig that brought Prince Charlie; the plague-ship steering to the Land of Trees with the people that were put away; the *biorlinn* that carried away the last of Boisdale's line,—all these and more were passing once where now go only brown-sailed fishing-boats; to shed a shadow less or longer on the red-heads down below; to darken their day for a space and fare out-by.

And they, unvexed of fire at any rate if not of sword, begetting and bearing and tying of thumbs under-seas; at their digging and delving, their carding and spinning and telling of tales or whatever;

unknowing all of that great Tale of Tales men sometime gave up life to tell in *Innse-Gaill* up-by,—what might have been their own sea-haps, I wonder, first and last? Will it be with the Celtic Gloom on them that they shall rise?

But it's not coarse weather, surely, that should sadden them when once they're up, nor the Tide of the Seven Changes even that should keep them indoors and in harbour, whose weltering skies would drop them down a foundered galley whiles aforetime, and whiles would rain slain fighting-men in helms and ring-sarks, red-staining round them as they sank.

I hope they've a good Scots tongue in their red heads, for so there'll be grand *céilidh* of a winter's night with them in ROCCABARRA, with stories from the host till day.

IV

But it's little of her by-gones, good or ill, that any Outer Isle of these shows forth when the sun's setting clear in a calm.

Who'd be thinking it then that time was and the haze was thick with reek of Uist's thatches, a long-ship riding in the Kyles, and white-headed Strangers at grips with Picts and Scots where now a little beach-fire burns, sending up in the still air a warning not of war, but only of someone wanting over?

Who'd think, to see her now, on famine and Fiery Cross and *fuaraidh-froisde*, on sheep put in where men were, and men shipped like sheep to the market?

Who'd mind the thousand years of fire and sword she's by with, the passing of things as they were and the Putting-away of the People?—and that's a *sgeul* would gloom you, Celt or *Sasunnach*, to hear.

Nor need you be going to any old wife for it: it's all in the Blue Books, though hardly so pretty by name.

The Islesman for me for pretty naming!—whatever the thing be itself.

And God knows *that* thing was nothing short of sin and a black shame.

When the storm-cloud was stooping on Uist, and she, purple-black, scowling back at it,—as is, indeed, her very frequent humour,—Father Allan used to say, "And there's your Celtic Gloom for you!"

Well,—and what wonder?

The wonder is rather to see her as now—as she were ROCCABARRA, risen within the hour, and all untrodden as a cloud.

V

Down at the water's edge breaks out, like cotton at the cracking of the boll, a puff of thick white smoke; tumbles up through the haze with more and more smoke tumbling after; loses heart up aloft for

all its hurry—spreads—thins—sinks—flows out at last along the water, and there lies heaping slowly.

"Someone is wanting over!" cries Father Allan. . . . It is, indeed, his own old signal, and at his own old place.

"Many a time you've waited there," say I.

"Yes," he replies, and, "Yes," again; and his voice is one's whose thoughts are pleasing him. I look up at him as we stand, and see him smiling, and his eyes following on the smoke.

"Do you know," he says slowly (for him); "in all that time it never once occurred to me there was anything out of the way in it. . . . I've had a quiet, happy, restful life," he goes on, gazing still across the Kyles; "a quiet, happy, restful life. . . . And all in the one piece."

So it was with this man in his last days, as it is with the sun at his westering; who looking back along the way he came, sees it lit up then so fair as never at noonday.

Now he must be stout-shod who would be footing it in *Innse-Gaill.*

But should he have the Triple Vow to keep, he might be finding something more of heart's-ease there than by some other way less rough.

THE FERRY TO POLACHÀR

We are hard upon St. Michael's and the end of harvest—such as harvest is in Eriskay. But only that here and there along the uplands the oats and the barley stand stiff in their stooks, that Uist hills show deeper wine-and-rust-stains, we might be still at Lady-Day. For where there is neither woody ground nor orcharding, and few are the sowings of seed, summer may go and autumn come, and the eye make little note of change. But one day in a neuk of the glen we come upon the whole tribe of the starlings at their hosting. And this is a sign to myself. . . . I must be flitting, too, I say; though, "You need not be hurrying!" says Father Allan.

And so, some few days later, near three in the afternoon, the sail-boat lies alongside *Rudha Bàn* and we stand waiting—Father Allan and I, the painter from The Other House, the girl that's away to the fish-curing at Yarmouth, and some women come down to be wishing me, "Good passage!"—while Gilleaspuig and the lads are getting the big box with the little harp in it across the seaware and aboard. Then Gilleaspuig, one foot on the gunwale and one on the rocks, puts out his hand to me, and with that I think, I must be saying good-bye

now to Father Allan. But the word is not out of my mouth when he says, "I'll see you on your way."

So, then, we are four for the ferry, besides Gilleaspuig and the lads that are to help him with the oars and sail. The bow for them, the thwarts for the rest of us, while "The stern-seat's always for me!" says Father Allan.

Our course is laid for Polachàr. Kilbride is the nearer, but the mile or so between, while well enough for walking, is otherwise for two-wheeled carts. At Polachàr, then, for the sake of our bones and what is in the box, the piper is trysted to meet us; and for love of what I am leaving, as well as of sailing on a day between two weathers, I could wish the ferry longer still.

For this is a day of such light airs that, only for rowing at the last, our sail shall hardly bring us over, for all the waters lie so sleek and still. To see them thus, that only yesterday were keeping boats in harbour, one might suppose some vast libation poured out in the night-time to appease them, and still overlying them; blue spilled on green and green on violet, strange oils and wines that still delay to mingle; whereover lengthens more and more our milk-white wake, like to a clue unwinding slowly as we sail.

To South of South-westwards, that being to sunwards, the blue, the green, and the violet dance away into a dazzle of no colour nameable; wherethrough —if one may endure to be looking—we glimpse

something moving, small and blackish, on the reefs. The seals, says someone, and they sunning themselves there now the tide is out. By times we hear them barking . . . a queer sound, and hinting that only for spells they are under, they would be the same as you or I.[1]

Still we hear them, and still the far end of our foam-tether holds at *Rudha Bàn;* and already the unearthlike look of far-off things is on the isle that drops astern. Already the Island of Youth lies in those reaches where, for some of us, Youth lies itself. . . . And where's the sail shall bring us back again, who've stood out-by? . . . Already is Father Allan's Island slipping—as he himself is slipping fast even now, did I but know it!—across the edge of Time. One by one, one by one, the black houses creep in amongst *Beann Sgrithean's* roots and hide themselves. *Beann Sgrithean* and *Beann Stàc* lay their two heads together: *Rudha Bàn*, for its whiteness, stands out for a little. . . .

But the thick purple-blueness gains fast on the four walls that housed me since Lady-Day, and the roof that covered me last night, and the belfry that sounded my waking when the sun that now is westering was still behind *Beann Sgrithean*. . . .

[1] "A man tried to kill a seal at *Struathan Sgat-an-Luatha,* North Uist, but it got away. Some time after, he was in Harris. He saw three red-headed brothers in a house, and one of them asked if he remembered the seal. He said it was himself, under a spell."—*From Father Allan's notes.*

The mists of the Isles, and the mists that are more than Hebridean are blurring them, blotting them, drowning them deeper and deeper. . . .

But not for that, be sure, would Father Allan wait to say, "*Gabh òran!*" nor does Gilleaspuig need a second bidding. So again I hear the song he sang last night in Father Allan's kitchen:

M. M. ♩=84. Keeping time with the foot on the floor.
mf
'Nu-air is mi leam fhìn, Bi tu tigh'nn fo m'air-e;
Bi mi tog - ail fonn - Air ni'n donn nam meall-shùil';
FINE.
'Nu-air is mi leam fhìn Bi tu tigh'nn-fo m'air-e.
'S mis - e tha fo chur - am, 's mi
'stiùr - adh nam bior-linn; Ciu - mar bhi sibh tigh'nn,
Cha mi tha air m'air-e' Nu-air is mi leam fhìn,

When I'm with myself,
You'll be coming o'er me;
I'll be lifting song
To the soft-eyed maiden.
It's myself that am throng
And I steering the *biorlinn;*
How I'll hold her straight,
That is all my thinking.

The voice of our *sgiobair*[1] is deep as the *bochdan's*[2] up my chimney in the house on *Rudha Bàn*, who hums there up-by in the night-time when the wind is rising; yet never did harp-string, high nor low, sing sweeter. And even as the wind itself shall warn you, by its savour, whether it blew from off the hills or off salt water, so by the deep-sea sound that's in Gilleaspuig's throttle you shall know him for none of the landward sort. Neither do his looks belie him, for what with sun and wind and spindrift, his cheek is well-nigh brown as his own sail. And aye he has the other verse, and aye as the chorus comes round we all lift under, while now as we near the land the light wind fails us. So the lads get out the oars and fall to pulling slowly.

Seumas is waiting, close down by the shore-rocks. They lift in the box, I climb in and sit upon it, Seumas starts up the pony, and down the lane and round M'Askill's peat-stack in the turn of it we jog and jolt. And so long as I am seeing Father Allan, he stands swinging his cap to me, while I swing mine to him.

[1] Skipper. [2] Bòch-kan—goblin.

"And what will you be doing here all winter?" I had asked him.

"Och,—making songs, I suppose!"

And even as he said it he was well-nigh done with songs and singing and all else.

For already it stood in the offing, the sail that was to take him over his last ferry, before another winter should set in.

OIDHCHE MHATH

No matter how long were the road of the Gael in his life-time, there is just one spot on earth where he would have it end. In the *Ur-chais*,[1] the home-ground, with his forbears, he would come back to lie at the last.

Now the graves of Father Allan's kindred are in Far Lochaber, yet he would have his nowhere but in Eriskay. . . ."Let me be buried amongst my dead and near to my living people, that I may be near them, and that they and I may rise together at the Last Day," was his last wish.

The little God's-acre of his island overlooks the strand and tops a sand-bluff, with the *Baile* at its back. When Father Allan first came, he found it overgrown with grass and nettles, sheep nibbling there and children playing, and nets spread out upon the mounds to dry. He had it cleared and mowed and fenced with broken oars and bits of drift-wood; and thereto, a fortnight past St. Michael's, his people brought him shoulder-high. And when it came to putting the sand over him it was neither with spade nor with shovel they were lifting it, but each was taking up his handful.

[1] Oòr-chash. *Ch* guttural.

So there he rests at last in his own island, who in an earlier age had been its Saint. The sand and the spindrift are blowing above him; all day about the place the sea-gulls flap and wheel. Hard-by in the *Baile* the folk are at work and the children at play. And if he hear them where he lies, so shall he sleep the sweeter.

Long time or ever I knew you, Father Allan, the Finger of Death was on you. Yet as young in your Island of Youth I can see you; in the mist, in the rain, at the ferry; keeping up your fire that is to let them know out-by the priest is wanting over, and in your mouth the *torraman* of a song.

Many a song may one be hearing, and many a turn of the tongue. Many a thing may one be learning and forgetting before the tying of the thumbs. But the speech of his mother who bore him, and the songs she crooned him before he was speaking—he HAS them.

And some of us had you life-long, Father Allan, and one but from a Lady-Day to near St. Michael's. But whether for longer or less, whoever had you once shall have you ever.

Your song is done, your fire is smoored. The man at the ferry is over at last.

But the breast-sons shall see their sons' sons, nor shall you be forgot.

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